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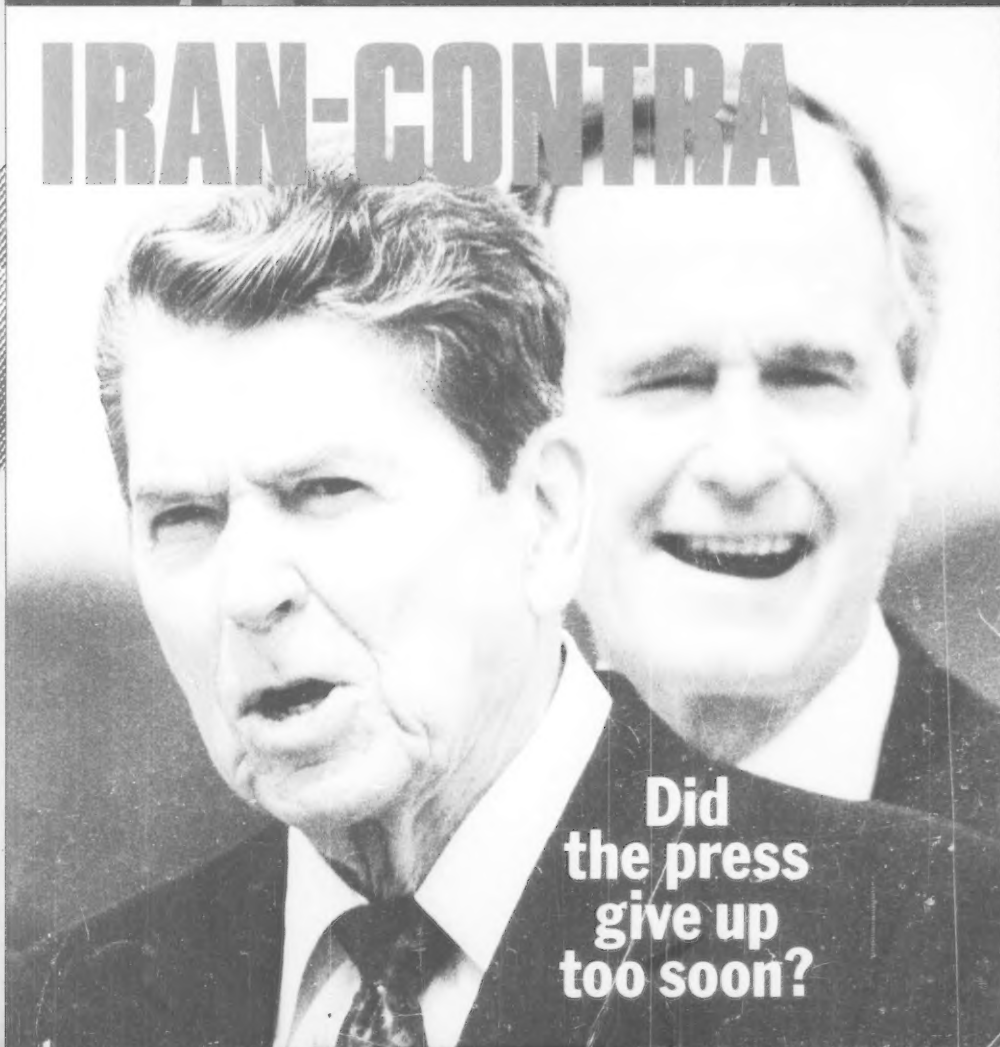
COLUMBIA  
JOURNALISM  
REVIEW

MAY/JUNE 1990 ♦ \$3

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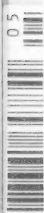


## IRAN-CONTRA



Did  
the press  
give up  
too soon?

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# "GO FOR



Marc Rankin  
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# OR IT."



Bill Studzinski  
Chemist

become the most important person. I think they're still a little amazed that we even *ask* for their input." Marc

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Carol Triebel  
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Kelly Mayo  
Systems Analyst

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# CJR

"TO ASSESS  
THE PERFORMANCE  
OF JOURNALISM...  
TO HELP STIMULATE  
CONTINUING  
IMPROVEMENT IN  
THE PROFESSION,  
AND TO SPEAK OUT  
FOR WHAT IS  
RIGHT, FAIR,  
AND DECENT"

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founding editorial, 1961



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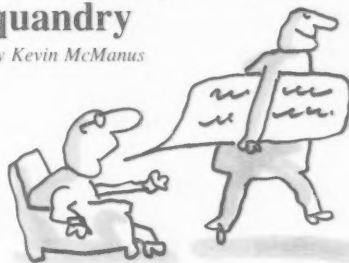
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# Ford Taurus SHO

Think of it as the official pace car  
of the *Fortune 500*.

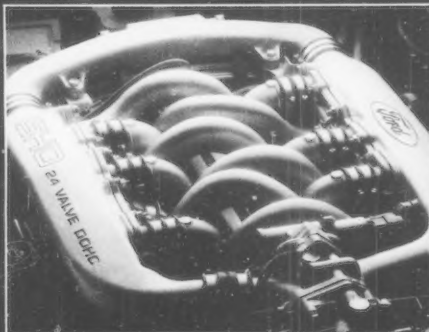


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# CHRONICLE

## RACE AND REPORTING IN SELMA

A JOURNALIST FINDS HIMSELF IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STORY

Selma, Alabama — a city of 25,000, roughly half white, half black — is famous as the city from which, twenty-five years ago, civil rights activists set out for Montgomery on a march, initially halted by police brutality, that prompted Congress to enact the Civil Rights Act of 1965. This winter, Selma was the scene of racial strife in the course of which a local journalist became part of the story he was trying to cover.

The recent controversy centered on the vote last December by the city's school board not to renew the contract of Norward Russell, the school system's first black superintendent. The vote, which divided along racial lines, was six to five. The white members' objection to Russell was that he was dictatorial in his dealings with personnel; black members countered that the real

reason the whites wanted him out was that Russell was opposed to the school system's educational tracking program, which he believed segregated black students from white students by placing the blacks in lower-skill-level classes. School boycotts were organized. In a city that was about to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the march to Montgomery and the 125th anniversary of the Civil War Battle of Selma, racial tension ran high. On February 5, Rose Sanders, a black Selma attorney, took part in a protest at city hall; she and several other protesters stormed into Mayor Joe T. Smitherman's office and Sanders, along with three others, was arrested on a charge of obstructing government operations.

Then the story got complicated: following her arrest and subsequent release on her own recognizance, Sanders claimed she had been injured by police officers as she was being taken to the station. She had checked in at a local hospital and on February 7 called a press conference there because "people were calling, asking to see me," and she wanted to answer as many questioners as she could at one time. Sanders arrived at the conference in a wheelchair, hooked up to an IV, her neck in a brace, one arm in a sling.

Immediately after the press conference, Alvin Benn, *The Montgomery Advertiser's* one-man Selma bureau, started getting calls from people "who said they felt it was a charade and she was trying to take us all in."

Along with Adam Nossiter, Alabama bureau chief of *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, Benn decided to check up on Sanders's injuries. They opened the door of her hospital room and saw her — without neck brace and arm sling — talking on a telephone which she was holding in the hand her doctor had described as "gripless" — that is, lacking the power to hold on to an object. In stories that focused on the school protest and Sanders's press conference, both reporters briefly described what they had seen.

In the polarized city, Benn says, his reporting made him "the hero of the white community — the same people who'd wanted to lynch me about a year ago" for articles about the city's black community that the whites "perceived to be positive" — and a villain in the eyes of the black protesters.

On February 10, at a meeting of Russell supporters held at the black First Baptist Church, Carol Zippert, who with her husband publishes the weekly *Greene County Democrat*, blasted Benn, who was there to report on the meeting. Zippert accused him of having acted unethically in peering into Sanders's hospital room and reporting what he saw. In a first-person account of the meeting that appeared in the February 11 *Montgomery Advertiser*, Benn wrote of what happened next: "'Out, out, out,' they began to shout at me, as two or three large chaps began to bear down in my direction." He decided to leave.

A few days later, at city hall, one black protester hurled a racial epithet at Benn. Jordan Gruener, a reporter for *The Alabama Journal*, which competes with Benn's paper in Montgomery, recalls that the person called Benn an "evil Jew." When Benn started to leave the building, protesters pressed around him. "It got kind of hairy," Benn says.



Patricia Miklik

**IN BLACK AND WHITE:** Alvin Benn, left, covering a march in Selma. Activist Rose Sanders, below, in her brace and wheelchair



Alvin Benn



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"They were pushing me around." It was the first time in his eleven years of covering Selma, he says, that he had encountered anti-Semitism.

Carol Zippert describes the anti-Semitic comment as unfortunate, adding that she does not endorse such name-calling. (Her husband, incidentally, is Jewish.) But Rose Sanders is not apologetic. "Jews will holler 'anti-Semitism' quicker than blacks holler 'racism,'" she says.

Since the incident at the church, Benn has continued to file two or three articles a day, such as his stories on the flight of white students from the public schools in the wake of the boycott that closed the city's schools for a week, on the march commemoration, and on the host of black activists who converged on Selma for the event. (A sit-in at city hall lasted until the end of March.)

Jeff Stumb, managing editor of *The Selma Times-Journal*, which picked up part of Benn's coverage of Rose Sanders's injuries from an Associated Press account, says he believes that his paper and Benn's have covered the protests and the personalities involved in them in a fair and responsible manner. Every

white journalist interviewed for this article, in fact, regarded Benn's reporting as fair and objective.

Sanders and publisher Carol Zippert see things differently. "Of course he's biased," Sanders says of Benn. "He gave the deliberate impression that my injuries were faked." Asked if she had perhaps exaggerated the seriousness of her injuries, she said, "It is racist and sexist to imply that." Both she and Zippert contend that a responsible reporter would not have resorted to subterfuge to embarrass a subject — Benn and Nositer found a way to Sanders's hospital room that bypassed the nurses' station and they passed a sign saying "Family Members Only" — and would, instead, have concentrated on explaining, say, the inequities of the tracking system, which they see as the heart of the matter.

Emily Bentley

*Bentley, who was a reporter for The Alabama Journal in Montgomery for three and a half years, was part of a team that won a Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for a series on Alabama's infant mortality rate. She now works for a magazine publisher in Montgomery.*

## CRUSADER VS. RAIDER IN ST. PETE

BEHIND ROBERT BASS'S GRAB FOR THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

Exploiting a family feud

Two summers ago, after a long-simmering dispute between the heirs to the closely held *St. Petersburg Times* reached the boiling point, one group sold its minority stake to famous Texas billionaire Robert Bass. Employees at the *Times* expected the worst, which seemed to materialize last January when the Fort Worth investor with a buy-em-up, bust-em-up reputation launched a takeover campaign. Both sides quickly lost their southern composure, and the *Times's* reputation for quality journalism has already taken a few lumps.

It couldn't have happened to an unlikely institution. The very structure of Times Publishing was designed to put journalism ahead of profits and to ward off the financial invader. After gaining control of the paper in 1947, Nelson Poynter published his "Standards of Ownership," based upon the notion that operating a newspaper is a "sacred trust." He vowed to pay above-average wages and promised never to build a chain of newspapers or invest in other businesses — activities that he felt limited a paper's commitment to its community. Under the terms of Poynter's will, the company's biggest shareholder is the nonprofit Poynter Institute for Media Studies, a foundation devoted to improving the standards of journalism through training and research. To ensure that journalism continued to be the top priority, Poynter gave the editor of the *Times* tremendous power, making him the head not only of Times Publishing but of the Poynter Institute as well.

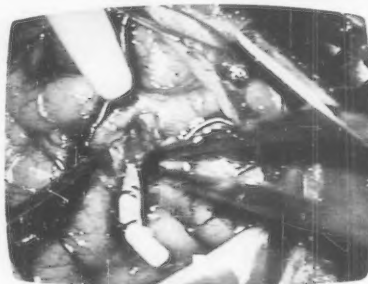
And the company, which publishes several magazines — including *Congressional Quarterly* — has flourished. The 106-year-old *Times* has won three Pulitzer Prizes for reporting and

### RESOURCES

## TV SCI PIX

The picture on the right, supplied by the Scientists' Institute for Public Information (SIPI), is from a videotape of brain surgery at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. The operation involves an experimental treatment for Parkinson's disease — the placement of cells from the patient's own adrenal glands directly into the affected part of the brain. This kind of medical story is relatively easy to do in print, but hard for television to cover without the visuals to go with it. That's where SIPI's Videotape Referral Service comes in. SIPI, a nonprofit organization founded in 1963 to increase public understanding of science and technology issues, has been putting reporters in touch with scientific experts since 1980. More recently, with its videotape service, it has been helping television reporters illustrate their stories. New York's WNBC obtained footage of an actual bone marrow transplant, for example; WBBM in Chicago got videos of the SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) project, which sends and receives radio signals from outer space, for a show on the search for extraterrestrial life; this spring, the *CBS Evening News* was planning to launch a regular weekly "Innovations" spot, relying heavily on videotape gathered by SIPI. The referral service staff (800-223-1730, or 212-661-9110 in New York State) works from tapes they have on hand, along with lists of material from other sources.

Allison Zisko



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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:



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1985

Pulitzer Prize  
for Editorial Writing  
Philadelphia Daily News  
Rich Aregood



Pulitzer Prize  
for Specialized Reporting  
Macon Telegraph and News  
Randall Savage  
Jackie Crosby



Pulitzer Prize  
for Investigative Reporting  
The Philadelphia Inquirer  
Bill Marimow



Pulitzer Prize  
for Feature Photography  
The Philadelphia Inquirer  
Larry Price

1986

Pulitzer Prize  
for Investigative Reporting  
Lexington Herald-Leader  
Jeffrey Marx and Michael York



Pulitzer Prize  
for General News Reporting  
The Miami Herald  
Edna Buchanan



Pulitzer Prize  
for Spot News Photography  
The Miami Herald  
Michel duCille and Carol Guzy



Pulitzer Prize  
for Feature Photography  
The Philadelphia Inquirer  
Tom Gralish



Pulitzer Prize  
for National Reporting  
The Philadelphia Inquirer  
Arthur Howe



Pulitzer Prize  
for Feature Writing  
St. Paul Pioneer Press Dispatch  
John Camp



Pulitzer Prize  
for International Reporting  
San Jose Mercury News  
Lewis Simons, Pete Carey and  
Katherine Ellison

1987

Pulitzer Prize  
for General News Reporting  
Akron Beacon Journal



Pulitzer Prize  
for National Reporting  
The Miami Herald



Pulitzer Prize  
for Investigative Reporting  
The Philadelphia Inquirer  
Daniel R. Biddle, H.G. Bissinger  
and Fredric N. Tulskey



Pulitzer Prize  
for Investigative Reporting  
The Philadelphia Inquirer  
John Woestendiek



Pulitzer Prize  
for Feature Writing  
The Philadelphia Inquirer  
Steve Twomey



1988

Pulitzer Prize  
for Public Service  
Gold Medal Winner  
The Charlotte Observer



Pulitzer Prize  
for National Reporting  
The Philadelphia Inquirer  
Tim Weiner



Pulitzer Prize  
for Feature Writing  
St. Paul Pioneer Press Dispatch  
Jacqui Banaszynski



Pulitzer Prize  
for Commentary  
The Miami Herald  
Dave Barry



Pulitzer Prize  
for Editorial Cartooning  
The Charlotte Observer  
Doug Marlette

Note: This award shared with the  
Atlanta Constitution



Pulitzer Prize  
for Feature Photography  
The Miami Herald  
Michel duCille

1989

Pulitzer Prize  
for Feature Writing  
The Philadelphia Inquirer  
David Zucchino



Pulitzer Prize  
for National Reporting  
The Philadelphia Inquirer  
Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele



Pulitzer Prize  
for Feature Photography  
Detroit Free Press  
Manny Crisostomo

1990

Pulitzer Prize  
for Public Service  
Gold Medal Winner  
The Philadelphia Inquirer  
Gil Gaul



Pulitzer Prize  
for Feature Photography  
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Pulitzer Prize  
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KNIGHT-RIDDER

## CHRONICLE

become Florida's second biggest daily, with 340,000 readers.

The crack in Times Publishing that Robert Bass is trying to exploit grew out of a darker part of Nelson Poynter's story — a bitter struggle between Nelson and his sister, Eleanor. Poynter bought Times Publishing from his father, Paul, in 1947. Under pressure from their mother, Nelson sold 40 percent of the common stock to Eleanor, along with enough preferred stock to provide her with 34 percent of the company's dividends. (Times Publishing's unusual equity structure gives extremely high dividends to preferred stock relative to its value.)

However, when Paul Poynter died in 1950, Nelson used his control of the voting stock to call in Eleanor's preferred, leaving her with 40 percent of the common stock, but just 5.7 percent of the dividends. Throughout her life — she died in 1987 — she refused to sell her common stock back to her brother.

After inheriting Eleanor's stock, her two daughters, Anne Jamison Parker and Mary Alice Jamison Griffin, approached Eugene Patterson, then editor of the *Times* and chairman of the company,

with an offer to sell back their mother's 40 percent stake for a reported \$120 million. When Patterson offered much less — between \$2.5 million and \$6 million, according to various accounts — the sisters went looking for another buyer. They found Bass, who bought the stock in the summer of 1988 for an undisclosed sum plus an agreement to share with the sisters 40 percent of whatever profits he could get out of the stock.

This past January, after negotiations ground to a halt with Patterson's successor, Andrew Barnes, Bass and the sisters offered to buy the rest of the company for \$270 million — about sixty-five times what the institute was earning in annual dividends. The offer underscored what Bass contends is a clear conflict of interest at the heart of the relationship between the Poynter Institute and the *Times*: as trustee of the institute, Barnes is obliged to act in accordance with its best financial interests, which Bass argues means accepting his offer — an offer that poses a threat to Barnes's position as editor and c.e.o.

**INTEREST, PRINCIPLES:** Nelson Poynter, far left, and his successor, Andrew Barnes, editor of the St. Petersburg Times. The paper is under pressure from raider Robert Bass, far right.



St. Petersburg Times

Even before the institute's board roundly rejected the offer two weeks later, Bass sued. His suit charged that the payment of 1,000 percent dividends on the preferred stock — almost all of it held by the Poynter Institute — is unfair to common-stock shareholders like himself. Times Publishing, for its part, sees the suit simply as an attempt to make the company more vulnerable to a takeover.

Some journalists see signs of another conflict of interest. Back in 1988, Barnes sat on the news of Bass's purchase of a minority stake, only to get beaten at the story by the *Times*'s fierce rival, *The*



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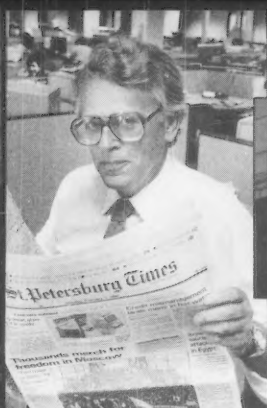
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Jim Tulen



porate raider to attack the *Times* "for purely financial gain," adding that he has little faith in the Texan's promise to maintain the quality of the *Times* should he take it over. Bass's partner, David Bonderman, meanwhile, told *The Tampa Tribune* that "the only newspapers that are run by a self-selected group of people that think they have no economic responsibility to anyone are *Pravda* and the *St. Petersburg Times*."

*Tampa Tribune*. More recently, Barnes held a page-one story about the history of the Poynter family feud for more than a year, and was beaten again by the *Tribune*. (As it turned out, part of the *Tribune*'s three-part series on the family feud at the *Times* had been lifted from an official history of the *Times* written by a *Times* deputy metro editor in 1984.) Barnes concedes that sitting on the initial Bass story was a mistake and that the delay in running the feud story was "rather long."

As for Bass, Barnes told his reporters that it was "unconscionable" for a cor-

All of this unpleasantness aside, the court battle over the *Times* boils down to a relatively simple question: Is the unusual arrangement that provides 84 percent of the company's dividends to the Poynter Institute, the holder of 60 percent of its equity, legal? This is up to the federal district court in Tampa to decide, which it is expected to do within a year. For the battle in the court of public opinion, Bass has hired former Jimmy Carter spokesman Jody Powell, who now works at the public relations firm Ogilvy & Mather.

Eddie Stern

*Stern is a reporter for Spy magazine.*

## NOISE AND SILENCE IN CUBA

HOW U.S. JOURNALISTS COVER THE ISLAND FROM AFAR

The escalating air war

Soon after the surprising February 25 election defeat of Daniel Ortega, many U.S. editorial pages began filling up with suggestions that Cuba's Fidel Castro would be the next to lose power. The assumption was that Castro's thirty-one-year regime couldn't much longer resist the demand for democracy that has spread from Budapest to Managua.

A glance at the datelines, however, showed that most of the columns had been written from Washington or Miami — not one from Havana.

Even as speculation about Castro's endurance is becoming a newspaper

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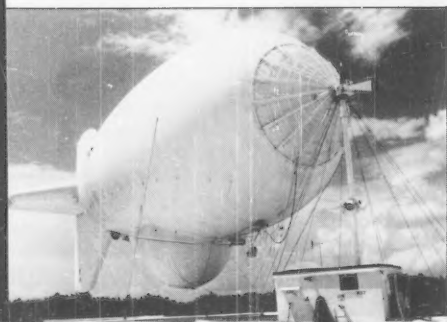
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**HOT AIR?** The TV Martí blimp, which floats over Florida and broadcasts news and entertainment to Cuba

trend, the bulk of the forecasts are being made in an information vacuum. Beginning last summer, Cuba drastically reduced the number of professional visas it grants to U.S. journalists. *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Miami Herald* were all denied official permission to report from Cuba for several months. No U.S. newspaper, wire service, or TV network has been allowed to maintain a

Havana base for several years.

The policy is frustrating to reporters like Mimi Whitefield of *The Miami Herald*, who was assigned to cover Cuba last November but has not managed to visit the island once. Instead, Whitefield covers her beat by monitoring Cuban radio broadcasts, reading the official newspaper, *Granma*, attending scholarly conferences as far away as Nova Scotia, and calling Havana sources willing to speak on the phone.

Ariel Ricardo of the Cuban Interests Section, a diplomatic office housed in the Czech Embassy in Washington, confirms that his government has recently decided to bar most U.S. reporters. "We feel U.S. coverage of our country has been an extension of the [Bush] administration policy, with its intent to isolate Cuba from the rest of the world," he says. "So we've limited access. We're going case by case. At this moment, the case is that no one is allowed."

There are some exceptions to Ricar-

do's rule. Among journalists who've recently been able to travel to Cuba with working visas are Ricardo Chavira of *Time* magazine and Annie O'Connor of Cox Newspapers. In my own case, although I managed to get a journalist's visa last August to report on Cuba for Knight-Ridder, when I tried again two months later I was put on hold. After five weeks with no response, I re-entered the country in December as a tourist, easy to do from Mexico, which Cuba has targeted for tourism. The visit ended on a sour note, however, when a colleague and I were arrested in the city of Guantanamo. We were released only after five hours of interrogation about an innocuous interview with an amiable elderly man who had been shining shoes outside his home. When I complained, one of the security agents told me to keep in mind that it would be unthinkable for a Cuban journalist in the U.S. to travel as freely as we had.

Indeed, the U.S. government has even tougher restrictions on Cubans. The only Cuban journalists permitted a U.S. base are two Prensa Latina agency reporters in New York, who are limited to covering the United Nations and must remain within twenty-five miles of the U.N. building. Cuban journalists cannot visit the U.S. temporarily, either.

Wayne Smith, a former head of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana who now teaches at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, says the problems with access on both sides are a symptom of the worst U.S.-Cuban relations since the 1962 missile crisis. He and other analysts predict more problems now that the U.S. has begun beaming televised news and entertainment into Havana. The plan, known as TV Martí after the Cuban independence hero Jose Martí — ironically, a fervent opponent of U.S. intervention — involves broadcasting from a blimp floating nearly two miles above south Florida.

Ricardo Alarcon, Cuba's ambassador to the United Nations, has warned that the broadcasts will lead, not to an enlightened exchange of information, but to a "battle of noises." In fact, that battle has already begun. Cuba started jamming U.S. radio stations in the early 1980s, with the start of TV Martí's prototype, Radio Martí, and then cut

## CRACK DEAL

### THE \$1,000 CONNECTION FOR DRUG REPORTERS

In pursuing a story on crack use and AIDS for *The Village Voice*, free-lance writer Daniel Lazare wanted to see a crack den from the inside. His inquiries led him to Terry Williams, author of *The Cocaine Kids: The Inside Story of a Teenage Drug Ring*. However, when Lazare was told by Williams's assistant that he would first have to pay a \$1,000 consulting charge, he told her such a high fee was out of the question. "It struck me as pretty venal," he says.

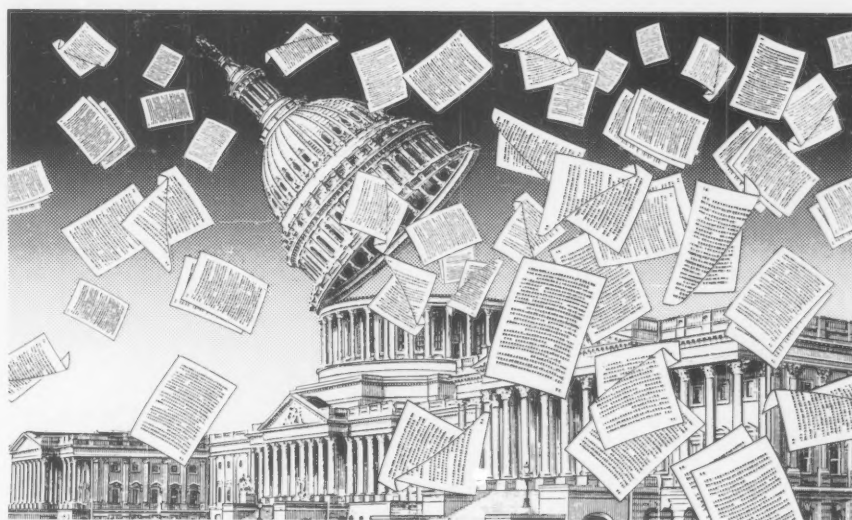
Another journalist, who asked not to be identified, didn't find Williams's bill so out of the question when she did a story on crack houses for *Epoca*, an Italian magazine. Her \$1,000 package deal included an interview with Williams, a guided tour of the crack house, and a set of photographs. "I'm usually against a fee," she says, "but in this case there was a picture service in exchange. Besides, it was not my money."

Williams, visiting scholar at the Russell Sage Foundation at City University in New York, says profit is not his motive, adding that he has to pay the photographer, people at the crack house, and cab fare, keeping "maybe \$50." His assistant, Sherry Perigrin, says some of the money goes toward Williams's planned documentary, "Crack: The Love Affair with Absorption."

Lazare later found another escort, Ansley Hamid, an anthropologist at John Jay College, who took him to a crack user's apartment free of charge. (Lazare says he did hand out \$30 to drug users who asked for money while he was there.) Hamid has also assisted other reporters, such as Gina Kolata of *The New York Times*. Taking them out into the field, Hamid says, "requires a commitment of my time; I have my classes, my writing. But \$1,000 seems a little excessive."

Dan Sheridan





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back on the jamming in recent years. Now it has started up again. Listeners in Arizona, for example, have complained about unwanted mariachi music drowning out their favorite stations.

The prospect of this escalating decibel warfare is one reason the 6,500-member National Association of Broadcasters has officially protested the TV Martí scheme in letters to Congress, which has already authorized \$23.5 million to the U.S. Information Agency for the program. TV Martí spokesman Michael Schoenfeld vowed the U.S. government

would be "prepared technically and politically" if the Cubans tried to block the signal. Nevertheless, Cuba did jam TV Martí's late-March debut.

Such developments worry many journalists, academics, and policymakers, who feel that both sides are making it impossible to hear the true sound of Cuba.

Katherine Ellison

Ellison is the Mexico City bureau chief for Knight-Ridder Newspapers.

# GREEN BAY HARDBALL

IS GANNETT TRYING TO FORCE OUT ONE OF ITS LAST RIVALS?

A decade ago, in a federal antitrust suit in Salem, Oregon, against The Gannett Company, a now-defunct weekly charged the big chain with using unethical tactics to drive it into the grave (see "Gannett in Salem: Protecting the Franchise," *CJR*, July/August 1981). What made the suit remarkable was the character of the Gannett letters and memos that found their way into the public domain. They revealed that Gannett's Statesman-Journal Company had launched a program called "Operation Demolition" against the weekly in which, among other things, Gannett representatives called "dobermans" were paid bonuses for driving accounts away from the weekly. In a letter sent to Gannett's former chairman, Allen H. Neuharth, the local Gannett publisher had written that "our goal is to fatally cripple" the weekly.

The man who gathered those documents was Richard McCord, former copublisher of a Santa Fe, New Mexico, weekly that had been in competition with Gannett. McCord used the documents in compiling a series about Gannett's competitive tactics. More recently, McCord was hired to help put together a special ten-part report for another newspaper having trouble with Gannett, *The Green Bay News-Chronicle*. The 11,000 circulation *News-Chronicle*, a morning tabloid housed in a former Green Bay convent, is pitted against Gannett's *Green Bay Press Gazette*, an afternoon broadsheet with 57,000 circulation in this friendly, shirtsleeves Wisconsin town.

The series, which ran in December, was headlined IT'S NOW OR NEVER! It paints a picture of a *News-Chronicle* that is satisfied with a small share of the total market and that survived by concentrating on local advertisers until the *Press-Gazette* began targeting and winning over key *News-Chronicle* accounts (and the city's legal-notices contract) with

# THE QUAYLE TRAIL

"KEEPING A WATCHFUL EYE ON OUR VICE-PRESIDENT"

You might think Dan Quayle has suffered enough. Between the stand-up comics, opinion polls, and the press, which has likened Quayle's composure to that of a deer transfixed by headlights (*Newsweek*), the vice-president gets plenty of hard scrutiny.

But Deborah Werksman and Jeffrey Yoder think he needs more. Their *Quayle Quarterly*, which made its debut earlier this year, devotes each of its sixteen serious-looking pages entirely to Quaylephernalia. What started as a joke, Werksman says, became a hodgepodge of humor and "critical analysis," including book reviews, commentary, interviews, and a "Quantified Quayle" column — a collection of relevant statistics (number of the last ten vice-presidents who have moved into the Oval Office: five; depth of Dan Quayle, in inches, according to two Indiana col-

leagues in the U.S. House of Representatives: one-fourth). Reprints blend with original reporting. "The Quayle Trail" cartoon charts the veep's adventures and verbal misadventures on a world map (San Francisco, October 1989: "The loss of life will be irreplaceable").

Werksman, who runs a relocation service in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and New York City, and her husband, Yoder, who is a computer analyst, believe Quayle is grooming for the presidency, an idea that makes the couple nervous. "It's scary," Werksman says, "but we'll probably elect him." So while they say theirs is "no crusade" against Quayle, it is also no joking matter.

Indeed, what worries the White House most about *QQ*, according to *Newsweek*'s Ann McDaniel, is that journalists "will read it on a regular basis and quote from it in more mainstream publications"—publications reaching far more readers than the quarterly's 1,500 charter subscribers.

David Beckwith, Quayle's press secretary, says he agreed to help *QQ* initially, but turned sour after seeing the "unfortunate" result, which he says contained "too many" errors to cite. The vice-president never saw the first issue. "I told him it wasn't worth his time," Beckwith says.

Brandon Mitchener

Mitchener is a free-lance writer who lives in New York.



"low-ball" bids. The *Press-Gazette* also abruptly ended cooperative distribution of multiple-advertiser circulars printed by the *News-Chronicle's* parent company, according to the series, and its advertising staff sabotaged joint-advertising accounts through such tactics as failing to meet deadlines for handing over ads already processed by the big newspaper, or even by losing or damaging the photostats.

*Chronicle* publisher Frank Wood believes that Gannett decided to squeeze him out after *Editor & Publisher* in September 1986 reported that his struggling tabloid seemed likely to survive. *Press-Gazette* publisher Michael B. Gage has consistently denied that his paper is doing anything wrong, or that anything

subscriptions. Home-delivery orders jumped nearly 10 percent in just a month, and some advertisers who had been lured away returned.

Wood says that he is gratified by the support and that if circulation and advertising keep climbing the paper could eventually break even, although this year it stands to lose \$500,000. Wood pins some of his hopes on an accord that would allow both papers to share non-

editorial expenses while preserving separate editorial voices, under a joint operating agreement. When Wood first made that suggestion in early 1989, however, Gannett rebuffed him with a curt letter that said an agreement was "inappropriate" because Wood had threatened an antitrust lawsuit.

Raymond Anderson

Anderson, a former New York Times foreign correspondent, teaches journalism at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.



**UNCHAINED:** Publisher Frank Wood claims Gannett competes unfairly

like Operation Demolition is going on in Green Bay. "It's our job and our right to compete," he was quoted as saying in a *Press-Gazette* report on the battle. To its credit, the Gannett newspaper printed an immediate story on the *News-Chronicle's* accusations, picked up wire-service reports about them, and printed some of the hostile letters it subsequently received.

In the special report, Wood asked *News-Chronicle* readers for their support, and some have responded energetically — pressuring businesses to advertise in the *News-Chronicle* and going to friends and neighbors to solicit

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## BREAKING STORY

# THE PRIEST, THE PROSTITUTE, AND THE NEW YORK PRESS

BY EDWIN DIAMOND

WITH RHONDA HENSLEY, SUNG HEE KIM,  
AND ELIZABETH WISCHUSEN

"On six," the desk said, and Charles Sennott picked up his phone in the newsroom of the *New York Post*. The man at the other end of the line on that particular day, October 12, 1989, had asked to speak to "a high editor," as anonymous callers often do. Predictably, he was switched to Sennott, twenty-seven, who had been hired on at the *Post* as a cityside reporter just seven months earlier. The caller claimed to be a former street hustler named Tim Warner. He was nineteen years old, he said, and he had a lurid tale to tell about Father Bruce Ritter, the founder of Covenant House, the street priest whom President Reagan, in a State of the Union speech no less, had hailed as one of America's heroes.

At first, the *Post*'s editor, Jerry Nachman, was prepared to dismiss the case as a mismatch — "the icon versus the prostitute." Later, however, his paper

*Edwin Diamond heads the News Study Group at New York University and is media critic for New York magazine, for which he wrote a column on the Ritter story. Rhonda Hensley is a member of the News Study Group; graduate students Elizabeth Wischusen and Sung Hee Kim assisted in the reporting and research.*

would go through two months of investigation — and internal arguments — before deciding to publish its revelations on December 12. And still the story is far from over. In early February, the Franciscan order announced that it was investigating Father Ritter's personal behavior and in early March staff members of the New York state attorney general's office revealed they were making their own investigation of the casual way Covenant House has run its business affairs (including failure to file certain financial disclosure forms). Whatever the outcome, it's doubtful that there will be any winners when the story ends. Reporters, writers, and editors at the *Post* and at other news organizations found themselves involved in several startling role reversals: the icon cracked, the hustler redeemed, the sensational tab vindicated, and the "serious" press caught with its assumptions exposed. Yet even without a final resolution of the case, the "Bruce Ritter story" already offers some instructive lessons.

From the start, very little about the story was straightforward. The teen-aged "Tim Warner" from upstate New York proved to be a twenty-six-old former Texan named Kevin Kite; Covenant House had provided Kite with the false identity, supposedly to protect him from drug dealers and the organized-crime figures said to run the mean urban streets. As for Father Ritter, he seemed to be the very soul of integrity. In 1968, at the age of forty, he had given up teaching at Manhattan College and had begun taking in runaway youths in his lower East Side apartment. By the time Warner-Kite called the *Post*, Ritter's non-profit Covenant House corporation was operating branches in New York and sixteen other cities in the U.S. and abroad. According to Covenant House's fund-raising letters, a staff of 1,700 was serving 28,000 young men and women a year — child-abuse victims, street hustlers, addicts, thieves, or just plain troubled teenagers on the run from home. Some 90 percent of the corporation's annual budget — the 1989 budget was \$85 million — came from contributions gathered through those fund-raising drives.

These letters failed to disclose the kind of information that would have given a contributor second thoughts before mailing in a check. There was, for

example, a \$900,000 trust fund available for Ritter's use. There were also the lucrative construction and design contracts awarded to relatives of Ritter. What's more, Covenant House's relatively inexperienced staff administrators were being paid exorbitant salaries, while the health benefits of the care-givers dealing with the kids in the trenches were being cut back. John Kells, Covenant House's director of communications — its p.r. man — was hired in 1985 for \$90,000 a year; Kells was twenty-five at the time and had previously worked as an assignment editor in the newsroom of the ABC television affiliate in Houston (Kells's benefits apparently also included a Manhattan apartment).

All of this news about an organization

◆  
**At first everyone  
said, 'Well, you know  
the *Post*' and shrugged  
their shoulders**  
◆

in existence for two decades came out in the weeks after the *Post* told Warner-Kite's story. Most notable among these follow-up stories were the well-researched investigative efforts by Russell W. Baker in *The Village Voice*, by M.A. Farber, Suzanne Daley, and Ralph Blumenthal in *The New York Times*, and by Michael Powell and Paul Moses in *New York Newsday*. But these articles represented a role reversal in themselves: the piling-on phase of the story after an initial detachment. By and large, the competition's first reaction to the *Post*'s story was marked less by curiosity about Covenant House and Father Ritter than by scorn for the *Post*. The *Times*, for example, took a minimalist approach in print, with modest stories balancing *Post* allegations against Covenant House rebuttals. At the beginning, recalls Ralph Blumenthal, "everybody was saying, 'Well, you know the *Post*...' and shrugging their shoulders."

In fact, the *Post* had not behaved the way "everybody knows" it behaves. Sennott met with his caller, took extensive notes, and made photocopies of the documents Warner-Kite brought along ("He had material that was detailed and



LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY CONGRATULATES

# The Winners Of The 1989 George Polk Awards For Special Achievements in Journalism

The George Polk Awards, conferred annually in recognition of special achievements in journalism, were established by Long Island University after Polk's death in 1948. Polk, a CBS correspondent, was murdered during the Greek Civil War while trying to reach the guerrilla leader Markos Vafiades for an interview. The circumstances of his death and the conduct of investigations following the discovery of his body in Salonika Bay are matters of continuing speculation and controversy.

## Winners of the 1989 George Polk Awards

### Foreign Reporting

China Coverage  
Nicholas Kristof and  
Sheryl WuDunn  
The New York Times

### National Reporting

"Project Senior C.J.:  
The Making of the B-2 Bomber"  
Rick Atkinson  
The Washington Post

### Regional Reporting

"Lost in Translation"  
Miranda Ewell and  
David Schrieberg  
San Jose Mercury News

### Political Reporting

Inadequate Federal Auditing  
Andrew Melnykovych  
Casper Star-Tribune

### International Reporting

Proliferation of Military Technology  
Stephen Engelberg and  
Michael R. Gordon  
The New York Times

### Local Reporting

Illegal Police Taping  
The Hartford Courant

### Medical Reporting

"The Great AIDS Quest"  
John Crewdson  
Chicago Tribune

### Radio Reporting

Panama Coverage  
Robert Knight  
Undercurrents

### Local Television Reporting

Hurricane Hugo  
WCSC TV, Charleston, SC

### Network Television Reporting

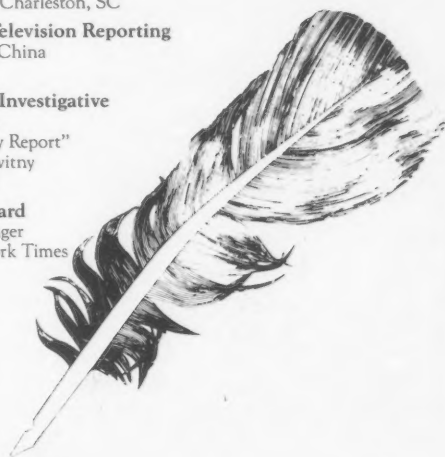
Uprising in China  
CBS News

### Television Investigative Reporting

"The Kwitny Report"  
Jonathan Kwitny  
WNYC TV

### Career Award

Fred Hechinger  
The New York Times



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easy to verify," Sennott says). The *Post's* senior editors closely supervised their reporters' follow-up calls, arranged for further meetings and stakeouts, and helped develop sources within law enforcement agencies. Sennott and his editors also argued for weeks about what sexual and financial matters were actually publishable; according to Nachman, the *Post* went ahead only after it confirmed that the Manhattan district attorney was actively investigating the charges — "and that made it a fucking news story," in Nachman's words.

Even then, the first *Post* piece confined itself to the allegations of financial improprieties by Covenant House, using the news hook that Father Ritter and Covenant House were being investigated by the district attorney. Investigators were described as looking into alleged misappropriation of money — specifically, some \$25,000 of Covenant House funds said to have been spent on an apartment, clothes, college tuition, a personal computer, and other "gifts" for a nineteen-year-old former male prostitute. The *Post* withheld the young man's name; it made no mention of any allegations of a sexual relationship between the priest and the prostitute. Nor did the *Post* choose to play some of the other investigative cards it was then holding, including a photo of Warner and Ritter getting into a car together. Instead, it fell to the respectable Associated Press to identify the *Post's* source as "Tim Warner." And it was the *Daily News* that, trying to match the tab competition, weighed in with a story alleging that Ritter and Warner had shared not just transportation but a motel room.

*New York Newsday*, the third tabloid in the New York market, initially distanced itself from the *Post*. Richard Galant, the metropolitan editor, would later explain that "we didn't have access to Kite." His reporter, Michael Powell, was a bit less guarded: "When you're not able to duplicate fast, then you kind of report the breaking news for awhile." In theory, that's a good positioning decision; in practice, though, it had the effect of tilting the story. The breaking news in the days after Sennott's story appeared was being created by Covenant House: Father Ritter's impassioned — and plausible — denials (he reminded everyone that he works with a lot of bad

kids); the magical appearance of Kite's father at a Covenant House news conference — the organization had flown him in from Texas — during which he denounced his son, claiming that the young man had a history of lying and hurting those who tried to help him; and the selective release of information, including documents purporting to show that the expenditures made for Kite were not unusual, given the high cost of living in Manhattan.

The flavor of *New York Newsday's* initial coverage is best conveyed by its page-four story on December 14. Headed DA ACTS TO QUELL FUROR OVER RITTER ALLEGATIONS, the piece offered a subtext of Ritter wronged. Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau, readers learned, "cautioned" that his investigation "is in its earliest stages." An accompanying piece by Dennis Duggan in his "New York Diary" column bore the explicit head A GOOD MAN SMEARED WITH RUMOR'S MUD. Columnist Duggan was by no means alone. Bill Reel in the *Daily News*, among others, saw Father Ritter's good works under attack, and hit back in his column. Sennott, for his part, also felt strong emotions. An Irish Catholic from Boston, he recalls that his first reaction after meeting Kite was, "I don't want this to be true." Still, he adds, "I went into a 'civil service' mode on the story, typing away, taking down

information, opening a file. . . ."

The *Daily News's* matching of the *Post's* stories in the first days after December 12 was the only other active reporting — as opposed to reactive stories — found in our survey of coverage for the rest of the month. Nachman, also watching the competition, went through the most paradoxical role reversal of all: relief when the *News* "stole our story" and then concern when nobody else did. As he says: "My first feeling was, Wow! the *News* is doing exactly what I would do. They're going to run with it and kill us. But then it all stopped, as if some unseen hand had come down and said, 'No more.' " In fact, a visible hand was at work: the Covenant House p.r. machine was earning its keep and on January 29 the syndicated television show *Inside Edition* offered its take on Kevin Kite's story. Bill O'Reilly introduced the segment thus: "Today we begin with the story of a smear."

In late December, events in Panama and Romania and the holiday season crowded out the story of the priest and the prostitute. It seemed to be trailing off in a blur of charges and denials.

And then *The New York Times* appeared, like a physician-in-chief, to breathe new life into the tab-born story. The *Times* had been running routine B-section stories on Covenant House and Father Ritter for the better part of a week

David Rintas/New York Post



**Tab holds back:** the *Post* let the AP and the *Daily News* draw connections between Ritter (left) and Kite (right) before running this photo



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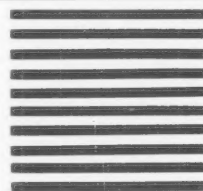
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when one of its most accomplished reporters, M.A. Farber, was called in by the metro desk. As Farber recalls, "I was told to take a look at it, and try to make sense of it, without a deadline." When Ralph Blumenthal, another senior reporter, came back from vacation after the new year had begun, he was assigned to the story as well. Later, reporter Suzanne Daley joined them.

The results of their investigative efforts appeared on page one of the *Times* on February 6. The story came in the *Times*'s usual cottony wrapping: IMAGE OF COVENANT HOUSE IS ERODED BY SEX CHARGES, the headline read. But well before the story jumped to a full inside page, the team of reporters delivered two explosive revelations. One involved Darryl J. Bassile of Ithaca, New York, who was quoted as saying that he had met and become involved sexually with Father Ritter in 1973. "I welcomed any attention I got," Bassile told the *Times*. In the days after the first *Post* story, Ritter had warned that "copicats" might surface and repeat Kite's accusations; but the *Times* pointed out that Bassile had told his story of sexual involvement to a psychotherapist in April 1989, six months before Kite had come forward. The other revelation was that Bassile had spoken to Father Ritter's superiors in the Franciscan order and that a panel of the Friary was looking into the case.

The day the *Times* article appeared, Father Ritter announced that he had decided to step aside from Covenant House during the investigation. A press release from the Franciscans corrected him: the leave of absence had been ordered.

Attempts to control the story and manage the press's interpretations have made an already complex story more difficult to cover. Several journalistic questions remain unanswered. Among them:

- Why did Kite go to the *Post* rather than a more "serious" paper? Many explanations have been put forward. In an interview with *OutWeek*, which describes itself as "New York's Lesbian And Gay News Magazine," Kite was quoted as saying, "I chose the *Post* because they were the most anti-gay paper around that I had read." By this curious logic Kite reasoned that if a "homophobic" paper believed a self-confessed gay hustler, everyone else would have to believe him, too.

- Was the press manipulated as part of a "conspiracy" to topple Father Ritter and Covenant House? Certainly there were, as Sennott says, "a lot of people with a lot of axes to grind." Ritter had served on Attorney General Edwin Meese's pornography commission; that angered some civil libertarians. Covenant House counselors were instructed to follow the tenets of the Catholic Church on the sins of homosexuality, and to move their youthful charges away from "unnatural" acts: this set some gay groups against Ritter. Also, the success of Covenant House irked competing welfare services that must also scramble for funds. Finally, Covenant House's large-scale, fast-turnover mode of operation — the McDonald's of youth services, the papers would come to call it — angered rival therapists and advocates of longer-term methods. All in all, then, a lot of people resented the attention and money garnered by Father Ritter and Covenant House.

- Why did it take the *Times* to "legitimize" the charges? Ralph Blumenthal thinks the fact that Ritter was asked to step down the day of the *Times* story shows that some people "suspended judgment until they thought responsible reporters had brought the facts to light.

- Is there something about the way the news is organized that works against informed coverage? The truth is, there is very little coverage of charities and volunteerism — this despite the fact that, in the Reagan-Bush era, money and energy have increasingly been devoted to the privatization of social work. Covenant House was one of the administration's thousand points of light; that's why George Bush paid it a visit last November. When volunteer groups and charities are covered, says Michael Powell, "all of us tend to write in touchy-feely, do-goody terms; in many cases that's accurate. But you can ask the same questions of charities that you would of anybody else." Martin Gottlieb, who has worked as a reporter and editor for the *Times*, the *Daily News*, and *The Village Voice*, suggests that the gaps in coverage are systemic: "If Covenant House had been some runaway project that was part of the city's welfare program, the stories would have been out years ago. There'd be a press grapevine; reporters would have their welfare sources, there'd be leaks." What is needed, he concludes, is a "private welfare beat."

Finally, though, the most serious gap involves not so much the organization of the news as it does the motivation of

Wide World



## Stories about Father Ritter and Covenant House had been bouncing around town for years

I think the whole thing would have died had we not weighed in." His colleague M.A. Farber adds, however, "If the *Post* had not started the ball rolling, no one would have seen the ball." Both reporters have a point. There is an assumption that there are two truths in the world — tab truth and *Times* truth — when in fact the difference may be in the packaging: "all that splashy overplay," in Farber's words. On the day of the most maniacal phase of the recent Trump madness, for example, the *Post* had the bigger Trump headline, BEST SEX I'VE EVER HAD, but the *Times* had more column inches of Trump stories.

individual reporters and editors. Stories about Father Ritter and Covenant House had been bouncing around town for years. Some reporters made a mental note to look into them "when there's time." Others were simply incurious, even when Ritter and New York Mayor Edward I. Koch, a couple of years ago, were locked in a fight over a building both men wanted for their own social welfare projects. "Koch had to surrender completely," recalls one of his close advisers. "There was a story for the press: Just who is this guy who's become stronger than the mayor? But no one seemed to want to dig." ♦

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# DARTS AND LAURELS

◆ **DART** to Liza Burgess, anchor of KTXS-TV in Abilene, Texas, for a demonstrated lapse in journalistic values. After wrapping up a live shot for the 6 P.M. news from the scene of a candlelight vigil by antiabortion activists on the seventeenth anniversary of the Supreme Court decision on *Roe v. Wade*, Burgess made an impromptu speech to the applauding crowd on the need for "family" values. "She didn't talk about abortion," said the *Abilene Reporter-News's* editorial page editor in a thoughtful column exploring the participation of journalists in such political causes, "but then at a pro-life rally you don't really have to. And 'family' is one of the group's key buzzwords."

◆ **DART** to the *Anchorage Times*, for slickly illustrating a five-part series on the Exxon Valdez oil-spill cleanup with three pairs of before-and-after photos provided by — but not attributed to — Exxon itself. As noted by the rival *Anchorage Daily News*, Exxon has been using the photos in a public relations campaign designed to show that nature and Veco International, the company hired by Exxon, have cleaned up most of the mess — a claim that many, including Alaska's Department of Environment Conservation, strongly dispute. Not coincidentally, perhaps, the *Times* was acquired by Veco just last year; its publisher and Veco's chairman are one and the same.

◆ **LAUREL** to *The Houston Post* and staff reporter Pete Brewton, for the riveting revelation of a possible link between the CIA and organized crime in the nation's multibillion-dollar savings and loan collapse. Based on court documents, sworn testimony, and law enforcement records as well as on interviews with key government investigators and prosecutors, Brewton's continuing reports (beginning February 4) suggest, among other things, that the CIA may have used part of the proceeds from S & L fraud to help pay for covert operations, including aid to the Nicaraguan contras, that Congress had been unwilling to support; that the agency has intervened in criminal investigations involving CIA operatives accused of S & L fraud; and that it may have been at least partly responsible for the fact that a substantial amount of suspected fraud had gone unprosecuted. (A 2,000-word follow-up dwelled in depth on Denver's failed Silverado Savings and Loan, three of whose largest borrowers appear to have connections to the Louisiana mob, the CIA, and George Bush's son Neil, a member of the Silverado board from 1985 until he resigned in 1988, one week after the Republicans nominated his father for president.) Curiously, Brewton's blockbuster has yielded rather low interest from the mainstream press; as late as mid-March, according to *The Village Voice*, none of the networks, and none of the "three print mastadons with the

clout to put a story on the national media's agenda" (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*) had bothered to report on it at all.

◆ **LAUREL** to WCBS-TV and senior correspondent Jim Jensen, for a wrenching series on the former anchor-man's life-and-death struggle to free himself from dependency on Valium and cocaine. Simple, honest, and direct, the four five-minute monologues, during which the camera never strayed from Jensen's face, provided moving testimony of the emptiness and despair that in a "downward spiral" had led to his addiction, and of the self-knowledge and hope that mark his continuing recovery. The reports, which were immediately followed by phone numbers for special information and counseling hotlines, generated more than 1,000 calls from viewers inspired by the personal message from a popular TV newsmen whom some had watched for twenty-five years.



◆ **DART** to the weekly *New Times* of Phoenix, Arizona, and rock music critic David Koen, for an orchestrated piece on the record-labeling controversy that was resoundingly off key. As a way of gaining access to Jan Brewer, an Arizona state senator who has proposed legislation requiring warning labels on albums containing obscene lyrics, the persona non grata Koen passed himself off as one Doug MacEachern, a respected political columnist for the *Mesa Tribune*; then, in a series of secretly taped telephone interviews, he maneuvered Brewer into articulating such words as "Fuck Like A Beast" and other examples of the titles and lyrics she thinks should carry a warning. The resulting article, *Jan Brewer Talked Dirty To Me*, was ballyhooed with a paper-sponsored "Jan Brewer Jam" session at the Capitol Mall, during which the senator's innocent utterances, expertly mixed with music, were blasted at the Senate Building over 800-watt loudspeakers at high noon.

◆ **DART** to the Daytona Beach, Florida, *News Journal*, and publisher Tippen Davidson, for giving new definition to the concept of advertising pressure. In a recent memo, Davidson urged employees to avoid shopping at Sam's Wholesale Club because the lower prices of the discount store are made possible by a policy of not advertising in newspapers. "This business tactic is a blow at our survival," Tippen wrote. "Further, the sales that go to Sam's



because of the perception of price savings, real or imaginary, *don't* go to our advertisers, who believe in selling their wares through our newspaper. In your own best interest, *please* don't shop at Sam's."

◆ **LAUREL** to the *Journal* papers of suburban Washington, D.C., and food editor Raymond M. Lane, for dishing up a front-page food-section piece generously peppered with criticism of newspaper food sections. Digesting the events at a recent International Food Media Conference in Washington, Lane roasted the sixty-odd food writers there for swallowing the self-promoting presentations by representatives of the food industry, government agencies, and health associations, and for failing to push for less one-sided discussion of such meaty consumer issues as food safety, labeling, nutrition, and controversial scientific studies; he also had some sharp observations on the practice of buttering up the food writers with spectacular meals prepared by top local restaurateurs. Of his own participation in the conference, Lane confessed that when he had complained about the industry-heavy menu of speakers, the organizers had offered him a free ticket to the \$300 event. Although he had accepted the offer, Lane told his readers, "I'll never do that again."

◆ **DART** to *The Seattle Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*, for early signs of institutional paranoia. The *Seattle* daily — and, by extension, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, its sister under a joint operating agreement — is currently refusing to accept any ads that mention Prodigy, a computerized telephone information service offering news, reviews, and ads for a monthly fee; what's more, according to Frank Wetzel, the *Times's* ombudsman, the paper is unwilling to say why. The only conclusion the public can come to, Wetzel observed in his column, is that the *Times* regards the system as a competitive threat to its own Infoline service, which offers similar information but has yet to attract a lot of ads. Likewise, the *Los Angeles Times* refuses to take ads for MovieFone, an automated telephone service featuring film locations and show times along with fifteen-second plugs; as reported in *The Wall Street Journal*, MovieFone's owners suspect that the paper is worried about losing its film advertisers to the MovieFone service. "The First Amendment doesn't mean we have to accept every ad brought to us," a *Los Angeles Times* spokesperson was quoted as saying. No, indeed. But isn't it odd how quickly papers forget that fact when it comes to defending their acceptance of ads for cigarettes?

◆ **LAUREL** to the Jackson, Mississippi, *Clarion-Ledger*, for an unblinking look at one of the uglier secrets in Mississippi history — namely, the powerful role in the 1960s of the state-supported Sovereignty Commission in subverting the cause of civil rights. The report (which was based on more than 700 documents officially sealed by the legislature until the year 2027 and which took up more than six solid pages of the paper's Sunday, January 28 edition), disclosed that, in addition to systematically spying on and harassing countless ordinary citizens suspected of sympa-

thizing with desegregation goals, the now-defunct commission enjoyed no small success in planting, slanting, and killing selected stories in the all-too-willing *Clarion-Ledger* itself. In one typical scheme a commission-supplied story linking the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., to the Communist party was given the semblance of credibility by appearing first — by arrangement — in an influential black weekly, the *Jackson Advocate* (whose opportunistic editor was on the commission's payroll), and only then in the *Clarion-Ledger*, which had agreed to pick it up with "full credit" to the *Advocate*. "In this manner," a commission memo to the file observed, "the story will be more effective because a Negro will be the author exposing the Communist associations of other Negroes. The Sovereignty Commission will not appear in any publicity."

◆ **DART** to WALA-TV, Mobile, Alabama, and anchorman/reporter Dave Daughtry, for supporting their local sheriff — and then some. Neither Daughtry nor WALA management sees any potential conflict of interest in his outside work as a media consultant to the Escambia County Sheriff's Department, on which he reports. "It certainly wouldn't affect me at all in terms of my reporting," Daughtry told the Pensacola, Florida, *News Journal* on February 13; his boss, general manager Joe Cook, agreed. The sheriff, for his part, was not surprisingly described as being "delighted" with his new p.r. man.

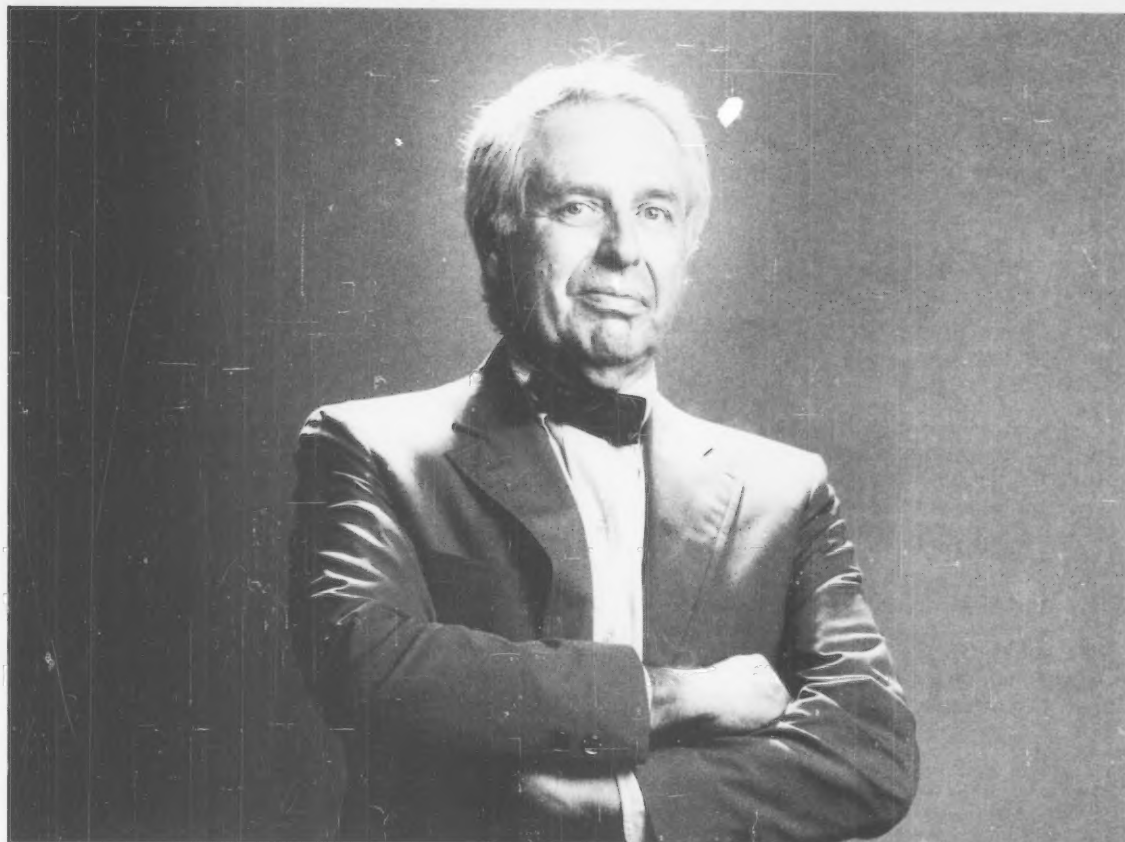
◆ **DART** to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, for using a journalistic elephant gun to bag a bothersome gnat. Alerted by a tip from its circulation department that some customers seemed to be taking more papers from *Post-Gazette* newspaper boxes than their quarters (and the honor system) allowed, editors swiftly dispatched a reporter and photographer to accompany city plainclothes detectives to a morning stakeout that produced three embarrassed perpetrators — and a front-page exposé. The thirty-six paragraph story, replete with the names, employers, and painful pleas for mercy of the three paper pilferers along with a photo of each, also produced a flood of letters to the editor from readers outraged by, as one typical letter put it, the "cruel and unusual punishment" meted out by the *P-G*. "People in Pittsburgh can sleep soundly tonight," mocked another. "We got them. . . . Forget the robberies of stores, gas stations, banks, and people; forget the muggings, rapes, burglaries, murders, car thefts, etc. We have to get these hardened criminals and teach them a lesson. . . . I think we ought to give them the chair."



Recent pilferer of Bethel Park Had two papers

This column is compiled and written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's managing editor, to whom nominations should be directed.





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# IRAN-CONTRA: WAS THE PRESS ANY MATCH FOR ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN?

BY SCOTT ARMSTRONG

Now that the latest chapter of the Iran-contra affair, the trial of John Poin-dexter, has drawn to a close, several questions haunt me. I am left wondering if that's all there is — or will there be a final chapter, one that puts the pieces together? I sometimes wonder if, should new revelations emerge — about George Bush's role in covert and illegal support for the contras, for example — the press would even bother to cover the story.

And if it did, would the story get the hit-or-miss attention given to chapter one — the covert operations while they were still covert?

Or would the press bring to the story the same tenacity it displayed early on in chapter two, which began with Attorney General Edwin Meese's stunning announcement of the diversion of Iran arms-sales profits to the contras and closed with the Tower commission's exoneration of the president — innocent by virtue of a staff coup?

Or would the coverage become as passive as it was throughout chapter three, months of congressional hearings

- which sidestepped the issue of a government that had gone off the books (covert operations masterminded by U.S. officials, funded by Saudi Arabia, and implemented by Israel);

- which bypassed fundamental constitutional questions

— questions raised by evidence of the diversion of American taxpayer funds to foreign coffers as part of an elaborate scheme designed to garner congressionally forbidden support for the contras;

- and which sidetracked the entire affair into attempts to answer such secondary questions as, Did Ronald Reagan know and approve of the diversion of Iran arms-sales profits to the contras?

Or would the press lose its nerve at key moments, as it did in chapter four — the 1988 presidential campaign? (Is it not astonishing that after the campaign we seemed to know less about Bush's involvement than we knew a year before?)

Or, worst of all, would new revelations be viewed with the myopia that vitiated chapter five — the Oliver North trial and aftermath? Where was the press, for instance, when

North's attorneys and the independent counsel agreed that the Reagan-Bush administration had engaged in a series of quid pro quos — economic and military aid to Central American countries in return for military assistance to the contras? At the time, sources close to the investigation said these acts (particularly the misuse of congressionally appropriated funds) were of such magnitude that they should be addressed through articles of impeachment.

As one of the major political scandals of the twentieth century melts into a formless puddle on the floor, I find I am not alone in posing these questions. The band of reporters who have followed the Iran-contra story from the beginning worry that many of their colleagues, not to mention the public, still don't understand what lay at the center of the scandal. Let's take one last look at what we learned about the Iran-contra affair and about the strengths and weaknesses of our collective journalistic performance.

## CHAPTER ONE: 1981-1986

# THE PIECES OF THE PUZZLE



The best traditions of a free press were frequently manifest during the five years of reporting between the start of U.S. aid to the contras and the administration's November 1986 acknowledgement of the Iran-contra affair. Journalists abroad — both American and foreign — kept close track of the contra story. Reporters from *Newsweek*, *The Washington Post*, *The Miami Herald*, and the *Los Angeles Times* traveled with the contras and observed them in their base camps. *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* vied to report on the presidential findings that authorized covert actions against the Sandinistas, competing to provide either the first revelation or the definitive follow-up, often correcting the others' account. David Ignatius and David Rogers of *The Wall Street Journal* provided excellent detail, with several stories about the contras' covert activities and the support they received from the CIA.

During this time it became increasingly clear that Congress had let intelligence oversight become a double entendre. Upset that it had been misled by CIA Director William Casey, Congress sought ways to constrain his enthusiasm for covert actions, sometimes by leaking information about those actions. In a further attempt to assert

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itself, Congress in October 1984 passed the second in a series of what became known as the Boland amendments — meant to keep the CIA from running a proxy war in Nicaragua. But before Boland II was even enacted, Casey and his colleagues took covert action off the books, beyond the reach of Congress. The now-infamous “enterprise,” run by Richard Secord and Albert Hakim at the direction of Oliver North, was quietly under way.

While major news outlets reported on the post-Boland II assistance to the contras provided by the Honduran and El Salvadoran governments — the quids — and on the beefed-up American money, arms, and military support which those governments received — the quos — the possible link between the two was left unexplored.

By mid-1985, a few reporters were already on the trail of Oliver North. Alfonso Chardy of *The Miami Herald* and Robert Parry and Brian Barger of *The Associated Press* were in hot pursuit. On August 8, 1985, as Congress was lifting the total ban on aid to the contras, allowing humanitarian aid, *The New York Times* ran a piece by Joel Brinkley and Shirley Christian which stated that an unidentified “military officer who is a member of the National Security Council” had been providing military advice to the contras. Despite some confusion in the article (North was a member of the NSC staff, not of the NSC itself), it showed a clear grasp of North's involvement. Three days later, Joanne Omang of *The Washington Post* for the first time identified North by name as the NSC point of contact with the contras. The *Post* article and a subsequent *New York Times* piece revealed that North's name had been withheld from earlier stories at the request of the White House, which had claimed that publishing the name would endanger North's life.

While a few reporters joined Parry and Barger in tracking North throughout Central America, exotic-sounding theories about an elaborate private arms network seemed to scare away the very papers — *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post* — that had earlier exposed the complicated exploits of CIA renegade Edwin Wilson, who had used some of the same personnel that would turn up in the Iran-contra arms network. By and large, news organizations pulled back from reporting on that network, focusing instead on Washington fund-raising for the contras and on contra propaganda efforts in the United States and Europe.

As for the Iranian end of this story, the press showed an ability to pick up pieces but less skill at putting them together. For example, dozens of stories made it clear that the government of Israel was selling arms to Iran; several of them even included claims by Israeli officials that the sales had been approved by the Reagan administration, which continued to proclaim its opposition to such sales.

There were two notable exceptions to the press's failure to ferret out the arms-for-hostages swap. On July 11, 1985, John Wallach, foreign editor for the Hearst Newspapers, reported that the U.S. and Iran had exchanged secret messages in “a mutual desire to improve relations.” In September of that year, Wallach revealed other details of the U.S.-Iran relationship and, on November 3, 1986, wrote that the U.S. had been involved in “secret negotiations with



Iran" since July 1985. Wallach's articles, published in various cities but not in New York or Washington, went largely unnoticed.

Then there was the case of Jack Anderson's resourceful younger partner, Dale Van Atta. By December 1985, Van Atta had assembled facts for a story about how the U.S. had allowed Israel to ship American arms to Iran in return for release of the American hostages. By February 24, 1986, the reporter had confirmed the details in an interview with President Reagan. Withholding explicit references to the deal at the president's request, Van Atta published glimpses of the arrangement beginning in April 1986. On June 29 he wrote that "secret negotiations over arms supply and release of American hostages have involved members of the National Security Council and a former official of the CIA." On August 11, the Anderson-Van Atta column took the story a step further, stating, "the United States and its Western allies continue to conduct secret talks and cut secret deals with Iran while...Khomeini's terrorist lackeys control the fate of three surviving American hostages — and several Europeans."

Unfortunately, because Washington journalists take Anderson's column with a grain of salt, and because they failed to link Van Atta's stories with other reports — such as Wallach's — they found it easy to dismiss his revelations. Moreover, most Washington reporters never saw a key element of Van Atta's work on Iran in 1985 and 1986, because *The Washington Post* consistently cut all but the first reference the column made to the death by torture of one hostage, the CIA's station chief in Lebanon, William Buckley. William Casey and others at the CIA had told the *Post*'s Bob Woodward — incorrectly — that Buckley might still be alive, and that stories about him could get him killed.

The sad lesson implicit in those five years of sporadically spectacular reporting is that the press corps does not read itself. There was no institutional memory. Break-

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### Oliver North's electronically preserved memos and mail show that the White House was tracking which reporters were making what advances on the story

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throughs by star reporters passed largely unnoticed by peers until months or years after they were first published or aired.

They were not unnoticed by the Reagan administration, however. Thanks to the inadvertent preservation of Oliver North's memos and electronic mail, on the so-called PROF system, the Iran-contra record is now replete with examples of the White House tracking which reporters were making what advances on the story, even reporters from the foreign press. Often the White House was able to keep Iran-contra revelations from resonating simply by denying and trying to discredit stories by such reporters as Wallach, Van Atta, the AP's Parry, and *The Miami Herald*'s Chardy.

As it happens, the Iran-contra affair took shape during the first decade in which electronic databases were generally available in newsrooms. A systematic search of the major electronic databases — Nexis and Dialogue — would have produced most major pieces of the story. If reporters had taken advantage of the electronic age to build on each other's work, more attention could have been focused not on *whether* arms had been sent to Iran, for example, but *why*; not on *if* the contras had been illegally resupplied after the Boland cut-off, but on *how* they were being resupplied and what that meant.

Thus, while North, Casey, and their colleagues were keeping track of the press, the press lost track of itself.

CHAPTER TWO: NOVEMBER 1986–MARCH 1987

## MEESE AND TOWER TELL 'ALL'



On October 5, 1986, a Sandinista surface-to-air missile crew brought down on Nicaraguan soil a plane involved in the contra resupply network, snaring numerous documents and Eugene Hasenfus, an American mercenary. Reporters began connecting their earlier reporting with the information that suddenly poured out of Central America. Privately funded public interest groups, such as the Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy, the International Center for Development Policy, the Washington Office on Latin America, the Christic Institute, and my own National Security Archive, provided the interpretive threads needed to link Hasenfus to the Reagan White House and its private support network. On a more practical level, they kept the story alive by supplying reporters with new details: phone numbers from the logbooks found in the downed plane and phone records from a safe house in San Salvador that, along with Hasenfus's confession, linked and relinked players in the private contra support system to the governments of Honduras and El Salvador, and, ultimately, to the White House.

Among those closely watching these developments was Manucher Ghorbanifar, a middleman in the 1985-1986 arms-for-hostages transactions, who insisted he still had not been fully paid for his part in the deal. Ghorbanifar, through intermediaries, warned Casey that if he wasn't paid he would reveal aspects of the deal in the courts. Subsequently, a leak to the Lebanese publication *al-Shiraa* resulted in a November 3, 1986, story about American officials visiting Iran to discuss trading arms for hostages.

The Hasenfus and *al-Shiraa* stories galvanized the press. Already aware that there was considerably more than had been admitted to the government's role in the resupply flights on which Hasenfus had been a crew member, reporters gave little credence to a series of White House denials of a scheme to swap arms for hostages. As the pressure built, President Reagan conceded U.S. involvement in the transfer of arms to Iran, but denied any arms-for-hostages

deal. Congress summoned Casey and Poindexter to clarify the unreconciled details and the two men lied to the Senate and House intelligence committees. As their versions began to leak out, the press compared details of their testimony with what was independently verifiable. As Attorney General Meese would later testify, this was precisely what he had feared the most — the press hammering out the details against the anvil of congressional inquiries, the unraveling of two years' of misstatements, including Reagan's, and, thus, possible impeachment of the president. To make matters worse, Secretary of State George Shultz was threatening to go to the Hill and tell more of the truth than his colleagues. Reagan put Meese in charge of damage control.

On November 25, in a dramatic nationally televised press conference, Meese gave the emerging scandal its name when he revealed that some of the proceeds from the sales of arms to Iran had been used to buy arms for the contras. He went on to lay out the principal cover story — namely, that the Israelis had sold the arms and diverted the funds, and that within the American government only Oliver North was involved with contra aid. The press swarmed over Meese's account, picking apart every inconsistency. Meanwhile, in what Reagan said was an effort to get at the truth of the affair, he appointed his own commission, headed by former senator John Tower.

During the three months in which Washington waited for the Tower commission to issue its report, it was open season on Oliver North. Despite the free-wheeling environment, however, the press collectively exercised a new-found discipline: stories in one paper corrected and built upon stories in another. The contours of North's activities in official and off-the-books covert operations began to emerge. Ghorbanifar, Secord, Secord's Iranian partner Albert Hakim, and Adnan Khashoggi, the Saudi arms dealer responsible for financing much of the arms-for-hostages deal

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**What had been an informed and independent corps of journalists mysteriously gravitated toward this one limited question: Did the president know of the diversion?**

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with Iran, became household names. The methods by which North had been able to tap a private funding network of rich conservatives, as well as the propaganda network he had set up with State Department funds, were revealed. The involvement of the Israelis in a variety of American intelligence activities was documented. Even the identities of the contras' secret funders, including Saudi Arabia, began to surface.

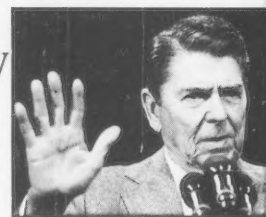
Then, on February 26, 1987, the Tower commission delivered its version of the scandal, complete with a guide to villains and victims. The nearly 300-page report depicted a clandestine coup d'état carried out by Casey, McFarlane, Poindexter, and North. The president, the vice-president, Secretary of State Shultz, and Secretary of Defense Caspar

Weinberger were all exonerated. Chief of Staff Don Regan was chided for the "chaos that descended upon the White House."

The report served the press well in at least one respect. Many reporters could comment openly on what only a few had pointed out over the previous six years: the president of the United States seemed utterly removed from the day-to-day flow of events: TOWER COMMISSION EXPOSES NAKED EMPEROR! Suddenly, sources who had been denying the obvious joined sources who had been trying to explain it away. The press printed the obligatory "but it is the president who determines the policy direction of the administration" alongside portraits of a disengaged and nearly irresponsible president.

## CHAPTER THREE: MARCH 1987–NOVEMBER 1987

# DAMAGE CONTROL: WHAT DIDN'T REAGAN KNOW AND WHEN DIDN'T HE KNOW IT?



As members of Congress readied themselves for the joint House and Senate hearings on the Iran-contra affair, the press began posing an Iran-contra version of the famous Watergate question: What did the president know and when did he know it? (The newly arrived presidential chief of staff, Howard Baker, happened to be the very senator who had originally posed that question as a softball for Richard Nixon.) The new question was: Did the president know of the diversion of monies from the Iran arms deal to the contras? And to this Baker and his aides felt they had an answer that would hold up under challenge.

Although the Tower commission version had minimized the president's knowledge, a skeptical press seemed to determine that the most extraordinary story it could write was one that proved that the president knew not only about both parts of the Iran-contra story but about the connection between the two. Pundits joined investigative reporters in marshalling "evidence" that this president would or would not have known about such a level of detail as the diversion of funds to the contras. White House sources were suddenly willing to talk about Reagan's detachment and about the departed senior staff members who had supposedly kept things from him — Regan, McFarlane, and Poindexter.

What had been an informed and effective corps of journalists, independently pursuing the story in the preceding months, mysteriously gravitated toward this one question. Reporters who had covered other aspects of the scandal were forced off the front page.

The Iran-contra hearings themselves, which began in May, 1987, yielded the best and the worst of reporting. In

cities that get Pacifica radio, aficionados of the hearings reprogrammed the first button on their car radio to get Larry Bensky's unparalleled coverage. Extraordinarily knowledgeable on his own, Bensky regularly turned to other journalists and experts to provide context. National Public Radio, public television, and a handful of print sources provided coherent daily commentary; the bulk of the coverage of the hearings was undistinguished.

The media paid little or no attention to how the committee's inquiry had been structured. Congress was not about to examine its own role in the affair — its endless waffling over contra policy, its failure to provide oversight of intelligence activities, and the desire of many of its members to protect Israel and Saudi Arabia from embarrassment. The committee, for its part, ignored the natural chronology of the tale, starting in the middle with the most contentious of all witnesses, Richard Secord. This made a coherent exposition of the events impossible. If the storyline of the Iran-contra affair was going to be laid out intelligibly it would be up to the press to do so.

Instead, reporters concentrated on who was scoring more public relations points on any given day — the witnesses or the committee members and their counsel. Finally, when Republican members of the committees began to convert the hearings into a debate over the meaning of the Boland amendments, the crowd of investigative reporters that had been pursuing the story the previous fall dwindled quickly to a small band (Bob Woodward, Walter Pincus, Joseph Pichirallo, and Dan Morgan at *The Washington Post*; Robert Parry, who had moved to *Newsweek*; Doyle McManus and Michael Wines at the *Los Angeles Times*; Roy Gutman and Knute Royce of *Newsday*; Steven Emerson of *U.S. News & World Report*; Stephen Engelberg and Jeffrey Gerth of *The New York Times*; James Ridgeway of *The Village Voice*; Karen Burnes of ABC News; Frank Greve of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*; David Corn and Jeff Morley of *The Nation*; David Rogers of *The Wall Street Journal*; and Miguel Acoca of *The San Francisco Examiner*). Sifting through new leads uncovered by the hearings, they occasionally linked up the new with the old. But once again most of their colleagues allowed themselves to be distracted, this time by the hearings' grand finale — the trumpeting of George Shultz's outraged innocence.

There had been indications of Shultz's involvement in the most constitutionally troubling portion of the scandal — the use of congressionally appropriated funds to get other countries to do what the U.S. government could not legally do. But the committee had ears only for Shultz's impassioned denunciation of the NSC staff. And the press seemed to join committee members in a bipartisan salute to Shultz's unsullied integrity.

The committee's final report came out on November 17. Its gist was that there was evidence of egregious abuses of power by members of the Reagan administration. But

doing something about them seemed to be a job for the independent counsel. For its part the press, having blamed everything once again on the National Security Council staff, seemed ready to take a break. Thank God, every wrap-up article seemed to sigh, George Shultz and Caspar Weinberger would be left to operate the government.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE 1988 CAMPAIGN

### IRAN-CONTRA BECOMES A PARTISAN ISSUE



UPI/Bettmann

In 1988, George Bush, formerly a member of an administration loosely under investigation, became a presidential candidate under direct scrutiny. Yet, remarkably, despite the fact that the committee's report offered a wealth of facts and leads, only a few of the most expert reporters felt confident enough to take on the issue of Bush's role in the affair. Among them were Bob Woodward, Walter Pincus, and David Hoffman, who in the January 7, 1988, *Washington Post* catalogued Bush's entanglement down to his being in the room when Reagan signed the Bible that would be delivered as a gift to the Iranians.

Other close looks were taken by Malcolm Byrne and Jeff Nason in *The Nation* and Judy Woodruff in a *MacNeill/Lehrer NewsHour* segment (in which I was interviewed, along with Lee Atwater). These were criticized by the Bush campaign staff as partisan. But the ultimate charge of partisanship was yet to come. This was, of course, Dan Rather's interview with candidate Bush.

CBS producer Howard Rosenberg was, along with ABC news consultant Frank Snepp, one of the most aggressive television journalists to pursue the Iran-contra story. It was Rosenberg who, after staking out Oliver North's suburban house morning after morning, had wondered how North was able to afford an expensive remote-control security gate. His reporting on that detail ultimately led to a criminal charge against North for having accepted a gratuity — one of the few charges on which the lieutenant colonel was subsequently convicted.

For the Rather interview, Rosenberg and fellow CBS producer Martin Koughan prepared a taped piece reviewing Bush's activities, highlighting claims that he had been "out of the loop" on Iran-contra and that he was "never involved in directing, coordinating, or approving military aid to the contras." It pointed out that Donald Gregg, Bush's national security adviser and a veteran CIA agent, had lied about his involvement in covert Central America policy.

Then came the interview, which was live at Bush's insistence. Bush came out aggressively, eating up air time by answering unasked questions. Rather maneuvered back to the key question: What role had Bush played in facilitating the arms-for-hostages transactions with Iran? The lead-in



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## **GOLD BATON**

Frontline for PBS  
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"The Choice," "Who Profits From Drugs?" and  
"Children of the Night," KQED, San Francisco, California

## **NETWORK TELEVISION**

Cable News Network  
for coverage of China

CBS News  
for coverage of China on radio and television

ABC News and Koppel Communications  
for "The Koppel Report: Tragedy at Tiananmen—The Untold Story"

Gardner Productions and WETA, Washington, DC, for PBS  
for "Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land"

## **MAJOR MARKET TELEVISION**

Byron Harris and WFAA-TV, Dallas, Texas  
for "Other People's Money"

KCET, Los Angeles, California  
for "For the Sake of Appearances" and "Expecting Miracles"

## **MEDIUM MARKET TELEVISION**

Maryland Public Television, Owings Mills, Maryland  
for "Other Faces of AIDS"

## **SMALL MARKET TELEVISION**

WJXT, Jacksonville, Florida  
for "Crack Crisis: A Cry for Action"

WBRZ, Baton Rouge, Louisiana  
for "The Best Insurance Commissioner Money Can Buy"

## **INDEPENDENT TELEVISION PRODUCTION**

Appalshop, Whitesburg, Kentucky  
for "On Our Own Land"

## **RADIO**

National Public Radio  
for "AIDS and Black America: Breaking the Silence"

# **ALFRED I. DUPONT-COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY AWARDS IN BROADCAST JOURNALISM**

A program of the Alfred I. duPont Awards Foundation  
administered by the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism

# How to keep oil spills from spreading.

This year, the Pulitzer Prize for national reporting went to four Seattle Times reporters for their coverage of the Exxon Valdez disaster and its aftermath. That coverage included a special series on oil tanker safety, which has been used in hearings on proposed double-hull legislation.

We're proud to have been awarded our fifth Pulitzer. We're proud of our journalists. And we're proud to be part of a profession that's helping to make a difference.



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# Celebrating Excellence in Journalism and the Arts

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## JOURNALISM

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**PUBLIC SERVICE (Two Prizes)**

● *The Philadelphia Inquirer* for reporting by Gilbert M. Gaul that disclosed how the American blood industry operates with little governmental regulation or supervision.

● *The Washington (N.C.) Daily News* for revealing that the city's water supply was contaminated with carcinogens, a problem that the local government had neither disclosed nor corrected over a period of eight years.

○ Also nominated as finalists: *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, and *The Tennessean*, Nashville, Tennessee.

**GENERAL NEWS REPORTING**

● *The San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News* staff for its detailed coverage of the October 17, 1989, Bay Area earthquake and its aftermath.

○ Also nominated as finalists: the staff of *The State*, Columbia, S.C.; and the *Roanoke (Va.) Times & World-News* staff.

**INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING**

● Lou Kilzer and Chris Ison of the *Star Tribune*, Minneapolis-St. Paul, for reporting that exposed a network of local citizens who had links to members of the St. Paul fire department and who profited from fires, including some described by the fire department itself as being of suspicious origin.

○ Also nominated as finalists: the staff of the *Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader*; and Olive Talley of *The Dallas Morning News*.

**EXPLANATORY JOURNALISM**

● David A. Vise and Steve Coll of *The Washington Post* for stories scrutinizing the Securities and Exchange Commission and the way it has been affected by the policies of its former chairman, John Shad.

○ Also nominated as finalists: *The Dallas Morning News* staff; the staff of the *Times-Advocate*, Escondido, Calif.; and Eric Nalder of *The Seattle Times*.

**SPECIALIZED REPORTING**

● Tamar Stieber of the *Albuquerque Journal* for persistent reporting that linked a rare blood disorder to an over-the-counter dietary supplement, L-Tryptophan, and led to a national recall of the product.

○ Also nominated as finalists: Jim Dwyer of *New York Newsday*; and Claire Spiegel of the *Los Angeles Times*.

**NATIONAL REPORTING**

● Ross Anderson, Bill Dietrich, Mary Ann Gwinn and Eric Nalder of *The Seattle Times* for coverage of the Exxon Valdez oil spill and its aftermath.

○ Also nominated as finalists: Charles R. Babcock of *The Washington Post*; and Gilbert M. Gaul of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

**INTERNATIONAL REPORTING**

● Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn of *The New York Times* for knowledgeable reporting from China on the mass movement for democracy and its subsequent suppression.

○ Also nominated as finalists: David Remnick of *The Washington Post*; and Serge Schmemmann of *The New York Times*.

**FEATURE WRITING**

● Dave Curtin of the *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph* for a gripping account of a family's struggle to recover after its members were severely burned in an explosion that devastated their home.

○ Also nominated as finalists: Jay Reed of *The Milwaukee Journal*; and Mark Kriegel of the *New York Daily News*.

CONTINUED

# THE PULITZER PRIZES



# Nicholas D. Kristof, chief of the Beijing bureau for The New York Times, and Sheryl WuDunn, Beijing correspondent, win a 1990 Pulitzer Prize.



For their disciplined, compelling and extraordinarily insightful coverage of political turmoil in China, Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn have won a Pulitzer Prize for international reporting.

In a year of epochal foreign stories, the most strenuous and difficult to cover was the Beijing spring, the sudden flowering and eventual crushing of a mass movement for democracy in China.

Mr. Kristof and Ms. WuDunn, a young husband-and-wife team, brought an extraordinary range of reportorial skills to their peerless coverage for The New York Times. They stayed close to the story from its inception, and provided the most sustained and sensitive reporting on China's upheaval. Together, they filed an astonishing total of 131 articles in May and June 1989 — 50 of which graced The Times's front page.

Mr. Kristof stayed abreast of this fast-moving, elusive story from the moment it began to unfurl. In one of his first reports, a subtle article of political interpretation, he articulated the themes of a student movement that had yet to find its voice.

Then, throughout the earliest weeks of the crisis, Mr. Kristof maintained excellent sources close to the contending factions in the Communist leadership. As a result, more than a week before the crackdown in Tiananmen Square, he was able to declare the ascendancy of hard-liners and the probability of military intervention.

At the same time, Ms. WuDunn was delving into the aspirations that propelled the students. The Beijing gallery that emerges from her stories is filled with figures who feel themselves torn apart by history's crosscurrents.

As spring waned and heavy clouds of fear gathered, the relatively open and accessible China that the two journalists had known suddenly receded.

Mr. Kristof was there when the festival of democracy in the square turned into a bloodbath. After the repression took hold, he wrote: "A few weeks ago, the society was a patchwork of different ideas, aspirations and criticisms; today, the Chinese in public again seem to have a single voice."

Mr. Kristof and Ms. WuDunn furnished The Times and its readers with exemplary journalism on one of the momentous stories of our time: "a distinguished example of international reporting."



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of the tradition.

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## JOURNALISM continued

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### COMMENTARY

● Jim Murray of the *Los Angeles Times* for his sports columns.

○ Also nominated as finalists: Richard Cohen of *The Washington Post*; and Walter Goodman of *The New York Times*.

### CRITICISM

● Allan Temko of the *San Francisco Chronicle* for his architecture criticism.

○ Also nominated as finalists: Jory Farr of *The Press-Enterprise*, Riverside, Calif.; and Wayne Lee Gay of the *Fort Worth (Tex.) Star-Telegram*.

### EDITORIAL WRITING

● Thomas J. Hylton of *The Mercury*, Pottstown, Pa., for his editorials about a local bond issue for the preservation of farmland and other open space in rural Pennsylvania.

○ Also nominated as finalists: David C. Anderson of *The New York Times*; and Leonard Morris of *The News-Sentinel*, Fort Wayne, Ind.

### EDITORIAL CARTOONING

● Tom Toles of *The Buffalo News* for his work during the year as exemplified by the cartoon "First Amendment."

○ Also nominated as finalists: Chan Lowe of the *Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) News/Sun-Sentinel*; Jim Morin of *The Miami Herald*; and Garry Trudeau of Universal Press Syndicate.

### SPOT NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY

● The photo staff of *The Tribune*, Oakland, Calif., for photographs of the devastation caused by the Bay Area earthquake of October 17, 1989.

○ Also nominated as finalists: an unidentified photographer for *The Associated Press*; Jeff Widener of *The Associated Press*; and David C. Turnley of the *Detroit Free Press*.

### FEATURE PHOTOGRAPHY

● David C. Turnley of the *Detroit Free Press* for photographs of the political uprisings in China and Eastern Europe.

○ Also nominated as finalists: Stormi Greener of the *Star Tribune*, Minneapolis-St. Paul; Robert Hallinen, Erik Hill and Paul Souders of the *Anchorage Daily News*; and John Tlumacki of *The Boston Globe*.

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## LETTERS

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### FICTION

● "The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love" by Oscar Hijuelos (Farrar, Straus & Giroux).

### DRAMA

● "The Piano Lesson" by August Wilson.

### HISTORY

● "In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines" by Stanley Karnow (Random House).

### BIOGRAPHY

● "Machiavelli in Hell" by Sebastian de Grazia (Princeton University Press).

### POETRY

● "The World Doesn't End" by Charles Simic (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich).

### GENERAL NONFICTION

● "And Their Children After Them" by Dale Maharidge and Michael Williamson (Pantheon).

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## MUSIC

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● "Duplicates": A Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra by Mel Powell.

# THE PULITZER PRIZES

Awarded by Columbia University  
on the recommendation of the Pulitzer Prize Board



DAVID A. VISE, who covered the SEC, corporate financial issues, and the Michael Milken investigation from The Post's Washington office, is now The Post's local business editor.



Until he became The Post's New Delhi bureau chief last fall, STEVE COLL reported on the financial markets and the Milken investigation from The Post's New York bureau.

## David A. Vise and Steve Coll Win the 1990 Pulitzer Prize For Explanatory Journalism

If ever the public needed to know what went on inside the Securities and Exchange Commission, it was in the 1980s, a period that witnessed a record rise and fall in stock prices, hefty borrowing to finance multi-billion dollar takeovers, the birth of highly speculative financial products and the biggest Wall Street corruption scandal in history.

Yet, the agency at the center of these events makes its decisions behind closed doors.

Over a one-year period, Washington Post reporters David A. Vise and Steve Coll worked to open those doors to public view. They conducted more than 200 interviews and examined hundreds of documents. Working with Post editors Tom Dimond, Steve Luxenberg, Bob Woodward and Peter Behr and staff researcher Melissa Mathis, they were able to illuminate the workings of a government agency that had never before been subject to such scrutiny and describe the role of its influential chairman, John Shad, in remolding the SEC and Wall Street.

For their February 1989 series "The Man From Wall Street: John Shad's Reign at the SEC," David Vise and Steve Coll have been awarded journalism's most coveted honor, the Pulitzer Prize.

In addition, the Pulitzer jurors cited three other Washington Post reporters as non-winning finalists—David Remnick for his coverage of the Soviet Union and East Bloc, Charles R. Babcock for reporting on congressional abuses of power and Richard Cohen for commentary.



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(400,000 to 1,000,000 circ.)

Condé Nast Traveler  
Hippocrates  
Metropolitan Home  
The New Yorker  
PC Computing

(over 1,000,000 circ.)

Business Week  
Glamour  
National Geographic  
Sports Illustrated  
Travel & Leisure

### PERSONAL SERVICE

Consumer Reports  
Fortune  
Harrowsmith  
Successful Farming  
The Washingtonian

### SPECIAL INTERESTS

Art & Antiques  
Boston  
Condé Nast Traveler  
Golf  
Golf Digest  
U.S. News & World Report

### REPORTING

The American Lawyer  
Audubon  
The New Yorker (2)  
Rolling Stone

### FEATURE WRITING

The Atlantic  
New England Monthly  
Rolling Stone  
Self  
The Washingtonian

### PUBLIC INTEREST

The Angolite  
Harvard Business Review  
The New Yorker (2)  
Southern Exposure

### DESIGN

American Heritage  
Condé Nast Traveler  
Esquire  
Hippocrates  
National Geographic

### PHOTOGRAPHY

Harper's Bazaar  
Hippocrates  
Life  
Rolling Stone  
Sports Illustrated  
Texas Monthly

### FICTION

The Atlantic  
Esquire  
The Georgia Review  
The New Yorker (2)

### ESSAYS & CRITICISM

Harper's Magazine  
The Nation  
The New Yorker  
Rolling Stone  
Vanity Fair

### SINGLE TOPIC ISSUE

Business Week  
The Nation  
National Geographic  
Personal Computing  
Scientific American  
Sierra

## NATIONAL MAGAZINE AWARDS

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piece had made it clear that during a trip to Israel in late July 1986, Bush had met with Israeli counterterrorism chief Amiram Nir. The piece pointed out that according to the notes of Bush's aide, Craig Fuller, which first surfaced in the Tower commission report, Nir had told Bush that the arms trade was "an effort to get the hostages out . . . the whole package for a fixed price. . . ." Moreover, since he sat in on at least fifteen Oval Office briefings of the president on the arms-for-hostages deal, it was logical to conclude that Bush could not be as ill-informed, even uninformed, about the deal as he professed to be.

Early in the interview, Bush tripped up on a key detail: he claimed that the staff memo summarizing his meeting with Nir showed that the arms-sales deal was an Israeli plan. In fact, the memo makes it clear that it was primarily an American initiative. Rather failed to pick up on this. He had been forewarned by one of his producers about Bush's next move, but still seemed flustered when Bush asked the anchorman how he would like it if "I judged your career by the seven minutes you walked off a set in New York?" — a reference to Rather's having left minutes of dead air at the beginning of a newscast a few months earlier.

Seconds later, Bush said he had gone along with the arms sales because he wanted to get one particular hostage, CIA station chief William Buckley, "out of there, before he was killed." Yet the record was clear that by the summer of 1985 the CIA and the White House believed that Buckley was dead; by fall they knew it. Again, Rather missed the significance of the slip. He also failed to follow up on the fact that the day after Bush met with Nir a new shipment of arms, which had been on hold, was suddenly approved by the president. And he did not pick up on Bush's claim that he never had an "operational role" in the deal — a curious defense given the fact that Bush had long claimed to have known nothing at all about the deal before December 1986, and that if he *had* learned of it, he would have opposed it.

The next day the press played the story as a major confrontation but paid scant attention to the substance of the interview. Bush was portrayed as a clear victor over the aggressive anchorman. A few days before, it had looked as if George Bush had both feet locked in concrete. Who could imagine a presidential campaign in which a determined press corps would not wrestle a presidential candidate to the mat to get some clear answers? And if the press corps could not, surely the emerging Democratic candidate would. Who could imagine *not* pursuing such a thing?

Encouraged by this p.r. victory, the Bush team resorted to the strategy of simply asserting that any questions about Bush or his role were essentially partisan. During a presidential campaign this strategy succeeded as it might not have otherwise. The Bush team stonewalled. Apart from David Hoffman's work in *The Washington Post*, the press did not make a serious effort at examining the vice-president's role in the affair.

During earlier stages of Iran-contra, the press had sought the interpretive assistance of public interest organizations. Now, with few exceptions, it eschewed similar help. The "Secret Team" theory offered by the Christic

Institute had proven useful when the institute was identifying — largely accurately — the network of individuals that North and Richard Secord had employed in their various operations. Less useful were the imaginative interpretations subsequently offered by the institute, making North, Secord, et al. part of a cabal that had grown out of World War II espionage, that financed itself with Southeast Asian drug smuggling, and that maintained elaborate secret facilities throughout the world.

Similarly, the "October Surprise" theory, most conspicuously preferred by former White House aide Barbara Honegger, initially asked a useful question: Given that some individuals connected with the 1980 Reagan campaign had made contact with Iranian representatives, and given that the Iranians held on to the hostages in the occupied U.S. Embassy until Carter's loss was assured, did the Reagan team promise to provide arms to Iran in return for delaying the hostage release? But a subsequent and more elaborate version of the October Surprise scenario was so poorly documented that the date of an alleged George Bush secret rendezvous kept changing as each old date was disproved by campaign film footage, newspaper clips, and schedules.

Afraid to be associated with these increasingly wild theories, most of the press backed off. By the time of the presidential conventions, reporters began to also shut out virtually *any* coherent interpretation of the Iran-contra affair. Without pegs on which to hang new facts, editors fell back to retrospectives about Bush's involvement in the scandal. Each new version was more watered-down than its predecessor.

The perversely protective rules of campaign coverage were taking effect: any story about Bush's involvement in the Iran-contra affair would have to contain increasingly serious charges as the election grew nearer. By the last week in October no story short of a confession by Bush would have been able to find its way into the media.

On November 30, 1988, the most likely vehicle for reporting on Bush's involvement in the Iran arms deal — Amiram Nir, who served as the point of contact with Israeli intelligence for both George Bush and Oliver North — was killed in a Mexican plane crash. Thereafter, even investigative reporters seemed to lose interest in the already well-documented set of facts about Bush's involvement.

UPI/Bettmann

CHAPTER FIVE:  
FEBRUARY 1989–MAY 1989

## A TWICE-TOLD TALE PUTS THE PRESS TO SLEEP



The North trial, which got under way on February 21, 1989, was covered by scores of reporters gathered for a spectacle. Some were familiar with the Iran-contra story, others were skilled at covering trials; few were both. The Iran-contra

aficionados tended to judge evidence as new or significant not in terms of its role in proving the case against North but on the basis of whether it advanced the overall Iran-contra story. But the way this trial unfolded defied the easy advancement of the plot. The prosecutors and the jurors had to be untainted by the immunized testimony provided in the earlier hearings. This meant that much of the early part of the trial was a recapitulation of details the public had already heard. Coverage fell off quickly.

By the time the newsworthy disclosures came, the trial reporters had taken over. The news came in the form of defense exhibits, particularly a stipulation between North's lawyers and the federal prosecutors. This summary of classified documents demonstrated that people at the highest levels of government, including then Vice-President Bush, had entered into quid-pro-quo deals with Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and other countries. Here was Oliver North's own defense attorney asserting that monies appropriated by Congress for one purpose had been used by the executive branch for another purpose — to support the contras — without Congress's knowledge. A series of potentially impeachable acts had been allegedly committed with the knowledge and approval of a former president and the participation of a former vice-president who was now president.

The networks and papers gave the story a one-day run, and that was more or less the end of it. Even news organizations that had provided excellent trial coverage up to that point — National Public Radio, *MacNeill/Lehrer* — seemed oblivious to the significance of the revelations. Legal specialists, such as Tim O'Brien of ABC and Nina Totenberg of NPR, fixed on the color at the expense of the political and foreign policy implications. *The New York Times* seemed to downplay the trial, as it had the hearings.

Prosecutors and defense attorneys alike complimented the *Post's* George Lardner, Jr., for accurately capturing the subtleties of the struggle over what classified information could be used and for connecting trial testimony to the Iran-contra narrative. Walter Pincus, David Hoffman, and Joe Pichirallo of the *Post* fleshed out the story of the various quid pro quos. Again, Pacifica's Larry Bensky provided exemplary daily wrap-ups.

After the verdict had been delivered on May 4, 1989 — North was found guilty on three minor charges, including receiving gratuities — reporters got another chance to sum up. Few could handle the sweep of information. *The Washington Post* and CBS, already accused by the White House press office of overplaying the significance of the North trial's revelations about Bush, began to understate the same information in their summary stories. Other organizations, including *The New York Times*, tended to confine any meaningful post-verdict analysis to their op-ed pages. At ABC, the story was assigned to *Nightline*, whose reporter Brit Hume considered the Iran-contra story to be, as he told me off-camera, "a nonstory." The publication that did comprehend the constitutional ramifications of the North trial is one not found on ever corner newstand. It was left to Theodore Draper in *The New York Review of Books* to put the trial in perspective.

## CHAPTER SIX

# WHO WILL GUARD THE CONSTITUTION?

While the North trial should have provided all the fuel that was necessary to keep the journalistic inquiry running, the press seemed to lose interest, perking up briefly only when some key Iran-contra players were nominated for high-level posts in the new administration. When Donald Gregg, Bush's choice to be U.S. ambassador to South Korea, was being considered, a few news organizations highlighted the implausibility of some of Gregg's explanations about his former boss's activities. (At one point, Gregg maintained that a career White House secretary must have written "resupply of the contras" on a Bush meeting agenda when Gregg had told her the meeting was devoted to "resupply of the copters." Not contras in Nicaragua, but helicopters in El Salvador, Gregg claimed, was the subject of the gathering.)

Neither of the other two presidential appointees who would have been aware of the circumstances of the quid pro quos pinned down in the North trial — Richard Armitage (nominated as Secretary of the Army, he later withdrew) and John Negroponte (ambassador to Mexico) — were seriously examined by the press. The congressional committees dealing with these confirmations, as well as other committees dealing with appropriations for Central America, began to examine the loose ends of Iran-contra but soon determined that there was insufficient public interest to warrant sustained public scrutiny.

Since the North trial I have talked to more than a dozen of the reporters who have methodically tried to connect the

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**If there is one area in which reporters should carry on without the peg of an official investigation, it is when constitutional principles appear to have been violated**

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dots to fill in the Iran-contra picture. Almost to a person, these journalists expressed frustration with three groups of players. The first two — the independent counsel and the joint congressional committee — were faulted for not pursuing the most obvious trails of evidence: the violations of law that occurred as the Reagan administration gave American assistance to third countries in return for acts and favors which Congress had either forbidden or would have forbidden had it known of them. These reporters rejected the independent counsel's position that his authority extended only to clear-cut criminal prosecutions and that such matters as the quid pro quos and off-the-books government activities were subjects for impeachment inquiries. Similarly, they were dismayed by Congress's unwillingness to seriously

confront the violations of the Constitution, particularly since Congress generally explained its inaction by saying it could not justify moving further given the lack of general public or even press interest.

But their strongest complaints were reserved for their peers — those editors and colleagues who treated the subject of constitutional violations as academic or, worse, as trivial, precisely because Congress had not responded with outrage.

As we have seen, one lesson of the Iran-contra affair is that reporters should pay considerably greater attention to each other's reporting. The more significant lesson, I believe, is that in a constitu-

tional democracy the press is responsible for holding the various branches of government accountable under the Constitution. In covering this scandal, the press largely failed to do so. Why?

Fatigue and boredom were certainly factors. So was the relationship between the press and the Congress. When Congress fails to act as an anvil, the hammer of the press flails harmlessly in the air. "If neither house of Congress cares, why should we?" went the typical Washington journalist's refrain.

The fervor with which serious journalists pursued Watergate was missing. For a time, that story was pursued by only a handful of journalists, but once evidence of serious constitutional violations was revealed by prosecutors, the rest of the media began to follow every trail, incrementally and relentlessly, until the story was told. This was not so in Iran-contra. Here, the press seemed to share, rather than challenge, Congress's willingness to pass the buck.

The recently concluded Poindexter trial provides a perfect epilogue. Once again, fundamental constitutional questions raised by the trial were virtually ignored by the media.

A highlight was the videotaped testimony of Ronald Reagan. Yes, the former president said, he did recall the 1984 meeting at which George Bush brought up the subject of third-country assistance and admonished all present that such aid would be permissible "provided that you didn't offer a favor or quid pro quo to someone in return for their helping the [contras]." Reagan made it clear that he understood Bush's point. "[We] must not make any promise of something we would do for them in return for that. . . . No, we couldn't — we couldn't offer a quid pro quo."

Minutes later, however, Reagan said that in early 1985, faced with "a possibility that Honduras was maybe going to back away from supporting the contras," his national security advisers "agreed that we should make an approach to the Hondurans which emphasizes our commitment to their sovereignty and provides incentives for them to persist in aiding the Freedom Fighters." Reagan went on to testify about his personal involvement in this and one other quid-pro-quo chain.

These admissions would have brought impeachment to the lips of journalists in the late fall of 1986. Yet *The New*

*York Times*, for example, barely touched on the remarks in the next day's story and failed to include them in seventy-three inches of excerpts.

Elsewhere in his testimony, Reagan framed the legal and constitutional criteria by which he apparently expects to be judged. Repeatedly the former president said that he had told his aides not to break the law and that he had never authorized them to lie to Congress. At the same time, he said he saw nothing wrong with Poindexter's statements to the congressional committees — statements which were clearly false, lies for which Poindexter was convicted in April. Listening to these two seemingly contradictory positions over and over again, it finally struck me that Reagan seems to perceive Congress as a debating forum in which the laws are merely the winning propositions, subject to further debate, rather than the body that is the source of the nation's laws within a constitutional system. Oddly, this also seems to be the view of many reporters, whose contempt for Congress is exceeded only by their own uncertainty about where constitutional responsibilities lie.

If there is one area in which reporters in America should feel compelled to carry on without the peg of an official investigation it is when fundamental constitutional separation-of-powers principles appear to have been violated. It would be unreasonable to expect reporters to lace their stories with references to the Constitution. But it does not seem unreasonable that allegations of constitutional breaches should motivate journalists to pursue their investigations to the very end. Were not the allegations of executive quid pro quos outlined by the cumulative evidence precisely this type of deliberate and knowing breach of Congress's power of the purse? Were not the actions that took national security off the books violations of other congressional prerogatives? Do not secret agreements between the U.S. and foreign powers constitute a form of unratified treaty? Are these not, taken singly, more than sufficient reason to keep alive full-scale inquiries in the major newsrooms across America? Taken together, do not these allegations amount to a newsworthy alteration of our constitutional system?

The managing editor of one major metropolitan daily refuses — like the late Supreme Court Justice John M. Harlan — to vote in any election for fear someone may ascribe to him a partisan motive. While I don't agree that journalists lose their franchise on election day, I can comprehend the position. What I cannot comprehend is the corollary belief that seems to have gained credence throughout the Iran-contra affair — that the media must cede constitutional questions to virtually any other major institution in our society. Have newspaper and broadcast editors declared stories that invoke basic constitutional questions too complex, too tough to handle? Is clarifying the facts surrounding those questions necessarily partisan? Have news organizations come to believe that they cannot fairly report on the government if they have to take a stand on what our Constitution means?



UPI/Bettmann



# SMALL SIGNS OF GREAT CHANGES...

## AT A CZECH WEEKLY

BY ROB WATERS

By the time Radek John, a well-known writer for the weekly *Mladý Svět*, returned to Prague on December 19, following a six-month working tour of the United States, Czechoslovakia had undergone a radical transformation. "Absolutely everything is different," John says. Sitting in the office of the paper's editor-in-chief, he points to the editor's chair and smiles as he recalls how, on his return, he had found his long-time colleague Lubos Beniak seated there. Puzzled, he had asked why. The answer was that, just four days before, Beniak had been chosen editor-in-chief in the paper's first-ever in-house election. The man he replaced, a former Moscow bureau chief for Czechoslovakia state television, had been unable to adjust to the new realities.

"When we had the first serious meeting after the revolution," Beniak says, "one of us asked this guy, 'What are you going to do, how are you going to lead us?' He wasn't able to answer. Everything he was trained to do disappeared."

"In the past," Beniak continues, "the role of editor-in-chief was to transmit instructions from the Central Committee, to guard the line, to be a good subordinate of the party and the bosses. Every editor-in-chief had to attend weekly meetings of the Central Committee. They were always under pressure

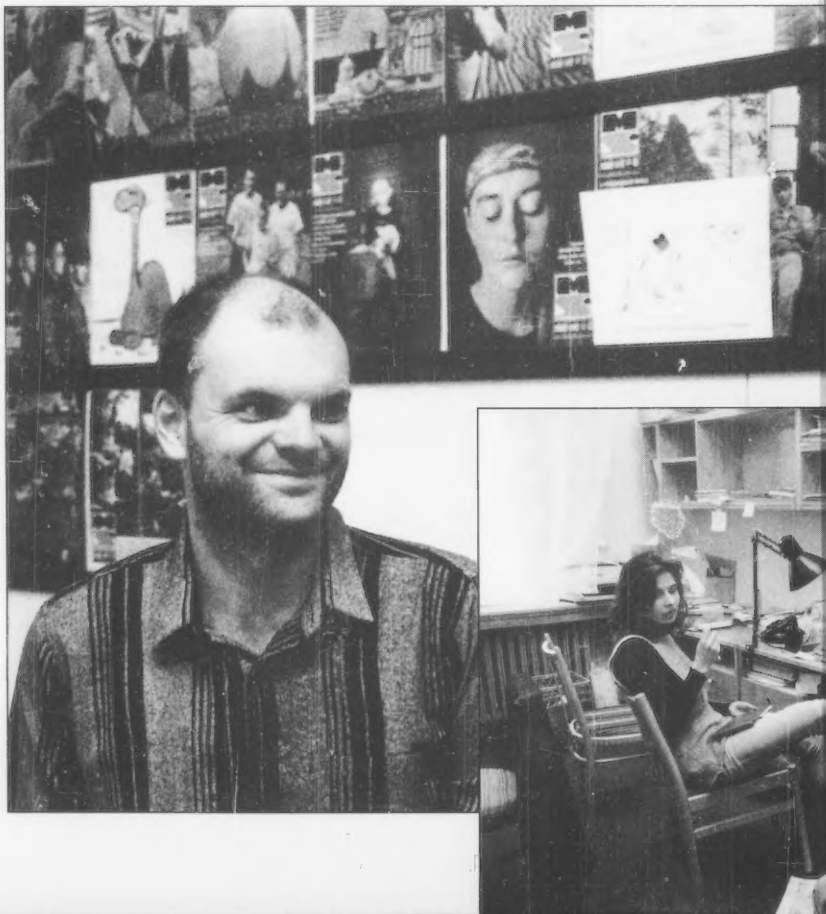
from the party and they transmitted that pressure to us."

*Mladý Svět* (Young World) had proved adept at resisting pressure, developing a reputation as a muckraking paper that pushed the limits of state control as far as it could. With the support of then editor Olga Cermakova, reporter

Josef Velek produced ground-breaking stories on the nation's massive (but officially nonexistent) environmental problems, and Radek John contributed exposés on such usually shunned topics as AIDS and drug abuse.

"We were the first publication to write about drugs in Czechoslovakia,"

both: C.J.P./Vladimir Czech Gamma-Liaison



Rob Waters is a San Francisco-based journalist who writes frequently on Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe.



John says. "According to the official line, drugs were related only to bourgeois capitalism, there were no drugs in a socialist society. I made contacts and lived with drug addicts. My editors let me work on it for three months and really protected me when the secret police came and said I was doing antigovernment work."

When the Ministry of Health asserted that there were no cases of AIDS in Czechoslovakia, John located five AIDS patients in the hospital. "We broke the story," he says.

For John, those were exciting times, when *Mlady Svet*, virtually alone among legally published papers, was breaking new ground to cover important social issues, always plotting and scheming to prevent party bureaucrats from interfering too much.

"To break some taboos — that was the most exciting thing you could do," says John. "If you succeeded, everyone paid attention to it. But now that feeling will be gone. I'm sure we will never experience it again."

In the radically changed environment

of today, *Mlady Svet* finds itself, in some ways, in a difficult position. For the first time it faces stiff competition — from established papers emboldened by the new freedom and from an eclectic patch of new papers that have sprung up since the revolution.

Some, like *Lidove Noviny*, were published illicitly in the past, part of the *samizdat* press that circulated in intellectual circles. Its contributors included a number of well-known dissidents who today find themselves in the new government — people like playwright Václav Havel, the country's new president, and Jiri Dienstbier, the new foreign minister. Its editor, Jiri Ruml, was in jail when the November revolution began.

Other publications, like the new midday *Expres*, aim at creating a tabloid market, filling their pages with "sensational, rumors, gossip, and unchecked information," in the words of one Prague literary editor. Judging by the long lines of people queuing up in the subway stations to buy *Expres*, the gossip tabloid may succeed.

So far, *Mlady Svet* is holding its 500,000 circulation in this new press war, says Beniák, who adds that last year the paper made a profit of 10 million *korunas*, about \$300,000 at the official exchange rate. The problem is that the paper could neither set its own budget nor retain its profits. Beniák and editors at *Mlada Fronta*, a daily owned by the same youth organization that publishes the weekly *Mlady Svet*, are working to

gain their full independence, including the power to set their budgets — but that may take some time.

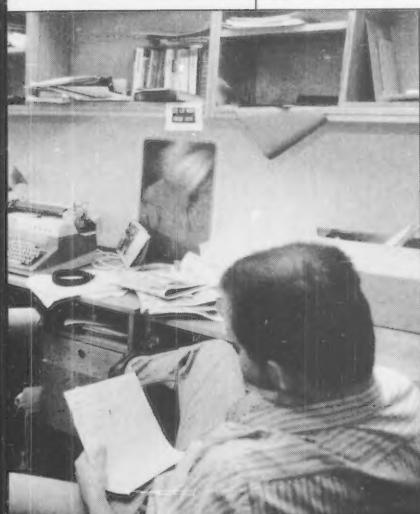
One problem faced by *Mlady Svet* and most other Czechoslovak papers is a serious shortage of paper and printing presses. In the past, *Mlady Svet* had to contend with an eighteen-day lag time between production and completed press run and had to limit its circulation. Beniák and the editors of *Mlada Fronta* are negotiating with a French publishing house about forming a joint venture that would provide them with the capital needed to switch over to computer technology and to buy their own printing press. "There is no time for evolution now," Beniák says. "We are so far behind. We have to jump over a half century."

While Beniák works on his time machine, the staff of *Mlady Svet* is continuing to do what they do best: investigative reporting. A late-February issue featured a story called "Contract," in which Josef Velek revealed a scheme hatched under the old regime to import toxic wastes from the United States. The story alleged that a U.S. firm was going to ship a half million tons of waste a year to Czechoslovakia, which would be paid \$8 million for accepting the shipments.

Beniák is convinced that, "if we were able to produce good stories in bad times, we will be able to do it in good times" — no matter how much competition his paper faces. ♦



**THE TABOO BREAKERS:** Lubos Beniák, recently elected editor of *Mlady Svet* (far left), and staff are building on the weekly's reputation for investigative reporting.



## AT A ROMANIAN TV STATION

BY PETER GROSS

Romanians in the western quarter of a nation that is roughly the size of Oregon have had a choice in the last ten years: watch Yugoslav and Hungarian television from across their south- and northwest borders, or two-hour evening broadcasts on official Romanian television devoted almost exclusively to ob-

sequious praise of Nicolae Ceausescu and his clan and other forms of propaganda. Nowadays these same viewers can feast on fourteen hours of official Free Romanian Television, still watch Yugoslav and Hungarian broadcasts, and stay up until the wee hours to watch two hours — from 1 A.M. to 3 A.M. — of the most freewheeling programs in all Romania, courtesy of Free Timisoara Television.

Free Timisoara Television is a highly unusual operation. Occupying only two

*Peter Gross, who was born and raised in Romania, has made several trips to Eastern Europe recently. He is an associate professor at California State University at Chico.*



CJR/Deborah Copaken/Gamma-Liaison

#### ANYTHING GOES:

*Tapestries provide the decor and home-video cameras are staple equipment for Free Timisoara Television's unpredictable pre-dawn news programs*

rooms in Casa Tineretului (Young Peoples' House) and protected by armed soldiers, FTT is a pirate station run by an amateur staff of students, engineers, teachers, and workers using donated and expropriated equipment. Established in Timisoara, the city that sparked the revolution that toppled Ceausescu, FTT became the first independent Romanian television in a city that prides itself on being "The First Free Romanian City."

It started as a one-man operation. "I decided to video-record a demonstration of 35,000 people in front of Timisoara's Opera House on December 22 so people in Bucharest and elsewhere could see the extent of what was happening," says Imre Gnant, an electronics engineer. He subsequently enlisted the aid of friends and acquaintances who owned VHS camcorders and taped weddings and birthdays to supplement their income. "They brought their own equipment, even pencils and paper," Gnant says. "They knew nothing of television production or news. Neither did I."

In the midst of the unfolding revolution, Gnant and his volunteer staff commandeered a mobile TV van belonging to state-owned television and took over a local relay station. With blank VHS tapes donated by Yugoslavian television stations just over the southwestern border, they set about reporting on the fight-

ing going on inside Timisoara, on the wounded and dead in the city's hospitals, and on the mass graves filled with victims of the dreaded Securitate. By December 24, the day before Ceausescu's execution, FTT was transmitting over the state-controlled, Bucharest-based television station that by then had renamed itself Televiziunea Romana Libera, or Free Romanian Television. "We were able to transmit only thanks to the goodwill of the Romanian PTT [Post, Telephone, and Telegraph] people," explains Gnant, who in the days following his initial broadcast received an unofficial go-ahead from state-owned television to send FTT signals over a specified channel.

**B**y December 30, Gnant's group was growing larger as more volunteers responded to a televised appeal for help. They had taken up residence in Casa Tineretului and, despite the station's unofficial status, had been accorded army protection. The soldiers who search each visitor are protecting three telephones, one record player, four VHS camcorders, three TV monitors, and a hodgepodge of other sound, transmission, and lighting equipment.

There is constant bustle at the station. Telephones ring incessantly. People call

in suggestions, tips, questions, and complaints about their workplaces or about their bosses, as well as their ideas as to how the city's many problems might be solved. In this sometimes chaotic experiment in community television, all manner of individuals and groups are allowed to offer their recollections of key events during the revolution, to tell stories of brave deeds and brutal savagery, to describe newly organized political parties, and to argue about the country's future. There is no anchor, no announcer, no moderator; what FTT offers is a forum for the exchange of ideas, as well as reports on news from Timisoara and other western cities.

Timisoara has long been accustomed to getting more than the officially sanctioned version of news, a boon it owes to its proximity to Yugoslavia and Hungary and to the fact that radio and television signals have not been jammed since 1964. Moreover, while police permission was needed to own a typewriter (the machine had to be registered annually), no such permission was required to own a VCR — a very useful device for recording and disseminating news from the outside world. Only the high prices demanded on the black market for machines smuggled across borders or brought in legally served to brake the spread of VCRs.

Then, too, in the last five or six years roughly 200 privately owned satellite receiving dishes were installed in and around Timisoara, a city of 380,000. "When Ceausescu asked what those dishes were," recalls a young electrician, "he was told by people they were solar receivers." "We even saw CNN reports," Gndt says. When Ceausescu learned the true function of the dishes he ordered them to be dismantled, reportedly because access to foreign programs would corrupt the young. A few dishes were removed; most remained in place.

This ability to receive news from outside Romania, Gndt says, allowed his fellow citizens to keep up with the outside world's reactions to Ceausescu and his regime, to see and hear dissidents who had escaped the country present their case, and to follow world events as well as those unfolding within their own nation. Gndt says it was the appearance on Hungarian television of Laszlo Tokes, the priest whose attempted arrest triggered the revolt in Timisoara, that "helped everyone to get to know him and his cause. That's how it was that people from all over western Romania came to Timisoara to protect him." (Tokes was interviewed in Timisoara; videotapes were then smuggled out of Romania and into Hungary, whose tel-

evision service provided a sort of relay station to transmit the interview and other information to western Romania.)

Gndt and his band of volunteers, whose number fluctuates between a dozen and twenty, are not surprised that a station like theirs has succeeded in a nation long starved for news and distrustful of the professionals who worked for Ceausescu's broadcast medium. "We could not have done it if we were not amateurs," Gndt says, "because the amateurs are the only ones who do not use the old vocabulary and are not tainted by their past association with official television and radio."

**A**t Bucharest's Televizunea Romana Libera, not one of the old newscasters was fired, the reason given being that none of them was a devoted follower of the detested dictator and that they had been compelled by "the Genius of the Carpathians" to present a stilted, propagandistic view of reality. "If it were up to me," Minister of Culture Andrei Plesu told a West German reporter from *Stern* magazine recently, "everything in television would have to go — the chairs, the tables, as well as the news presenters."

At the tiny Free Timisoara Television station there are no worries about clean-

ing house. What concerns Gndt and his staff can be summed up in two questions: Will they be granted an official license to operate an independent and possibly commercial station? And will they get help from abroad that will enable them to set up a modern television studio? When Gndt speaks of help he means not just state-of-the-art broadcast equipment, but training in operating this equipment and instruction in journalistic techniques and managerial skills. "Get people over here to provide us with some training," Gndt pleads, and he goes on to suggest that a Peace Corps-type program should be set up in Romania. Such pleas are echoed by other Romanian journalists and have been heeded by organizations such as the Voice of America, which is now organizing training seminars for Romanian and other Eastern European journalists.

Foreign investments in the country's mass media, guarantees of press freedoms, and the structure of the print and broadcast media are matters that have yet to be resolved. A commission appointed by the government has been working on a new press law since mid-January. Meanwhile, Free Timisoara Television remains on the air — a fascinating pirate waiting hopefully to be granted legitimacy under the new law. ♦



#### PROTECTED PIRATES:

*The station founded by Imre Gndt (above) and staffed by volunteers has yet to win official approval, yet the army provides guards for its scanty equipment.*

# MEMO TO LOCAL NEWS DIRECTORS

## RE: IMPROVING THE PRODUCT



BY JON KATZ

You've all seen the same market research, shared the same certainties about what viewers most want: a nice middle-aged male anchor, pleasant but dignified. A woman alongside but not dominant. A "family" that includes a knowledgeable weatherperson and a sportscaster. Lots of crackling video. Short, fast pieces that keep the viewer's fingers away from the zapper.

You also know this isn't enough anymore.

No newspaper editor has ever faced in a year what you confront every day. Print struggles are glacial: papers have staggered, sometimes died, while editors debate whether color photographs will demean their integrity.

In local television, the battle rages and blood flows almost continuously. Arrayed against you, waiting to exploit just one boring segment, one dull piece of videotape, one sleepy anchor, is an awesome array of options, from CNN to HBO to MTV to Nickelodeon to *Wheel of Fortune* to *Inside Edition* to sports, community access, and shopping channels. That's all assuming that the kids aren't playing Nintendo.

You live like New York Yankee managers: three seasons is a good run. You are under constant pressure to satisfy corporate owners who are used to staggering profits; from civic, governmental, and academic critics who trash you as superficial and irresponsible; and from print journalists who approach your work like Victorian matrons stepping in dog poop. In your world, paranoia is not a psychological disorder but a rational response. Competition is coming at you from all sides. The viewers have taken over, and it isn't a gentle revolution.

Newspaper editors, who line up to get on convention panels and talk shows to denounce the quality of TV news, seem not to notice that most of their own television reporters cover broadcasting almost exclusively in terms of ratings wars and celebrity profiles — the very things they are denouncing — while the technological, economic, and corporate forces that drive your business and are making you all crazy are only glancingly explored.

As a result, few TV viewers understand that broadcast journalism is in the midst of its greatest upheaval since Murrow stood on a rooftop in London looking for German planes. Media historians will be describing this time as a crossroads for local television, citing statistics that document how the commercial networks have lost their grip on America. A decade ago the big three were watched by more than 95 percent of the television audience; today the figure hovers around 60 percent. More than 75,500 homes are

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*Jon Katz, a former executive producer of the CBS Morning News and a former managing editor of the Dallas Times Herald, teaches journalism at New York University.*



hooking up to cable each week. CNN — which reached 33.5 million households in 1985 and is seen in 54 million homes now — has rendered almost obsolete the notion of fixed-time national newscasts. In television's own perestroika, the accepted boundaries of local news are changing — *have* to change. You are all looking for new approaches. What about these:

## Deploy your troops to break stories

The concept of beats, long employed by newspapers and magazines, has rarely been adopted by local TV stations. Yet only beat reporters, who focus on one or two subject areas, can develop the instincts, contacts, and expertise required to regularly break stories. The bigger local stations have begun deploying reporters to cover politics and consumer affairs (a consistent market research favorite) and to cover and critique mainstream cultural stories such as big movies. But local stations have failed to really develop this readily applicable newspaper tradition, one that would allow them to start breaking stories, which in turn would give viewers a strong incentive to stay with local news in the face of stiff cable and VCR competition.

The argument against adopting the beat system is simple: cost. In a major market, say news directors, a general assignment television reporter is paid about \$70,000, a specialized or beat reporter up to \$100,000. A producer averages \$50,000. In major markets where overtime is commonplace, cameramen and -women may earn \$90,000; so, too, may tape editors and technicians. So, while salaries vary, the cost of fielding a local reporter/producer team in a big city can run to at least \$225,000 a year.

One solution: hire off-air producer/reporters — specialists who would earn less than on-air correspondents and who could work alone to report stories, turning over their reports to on-air anchors or reporters. Camera crews could be sent for video when and where possible, with graphics substituting in cases where pictures are unavailable. Larger stations could hire four or five reporters, at up to \$50,000 each, for the price of a correspondent/production crew. The reporters could be credited on the air for their work, and stations could begin breaking more stories on the crime and justice, environment, life-style, medicine, religion, and science and technology beats.

As for investigative reporting, though general managers and news directors fear the sort of lengthy commitment newspapers make, there can be a middle ground. Early this year WCPO in Cincinnati sent a reporter and crew out to follow municipal pothole repair crews. They found some city workers less than diligent. One crew didn't fix a single pothole all day. Others took generous lunch hours and coffee breaks. Station officials say they were overwhelmed by the response: in addition to laudatory editorials in local newspapers, WCPO received hundreds of calls from pleased viewers offering further tips.

Print — especially magazines — long ago discovered the financial and editorial value of part-time employees. Given declining audiences and fragmenting advertising revenues, many of you can't hire more staff, especially in a flat economy. But you could hire part-time staffers or independent production companies to develop local programming. If a program develops a following, the staff could be retained. In some markets, union contracts prohibit such arrangements. But elsewhere, if stations don't have the staff or budget to experiment, why not contract some enterprising coverage to outsiders?

## Is it a trend?

You say you are stumped by the need to cover different regions in your huge geographical broadcast areas. You cite examples like New York, where stations have to cover the same ground in their newscasts as the New York City dailies, as well as *Newsday* on Long Island, *The Record* and *Star-Ledger* in New Jersey, and the Gannett papers in suburban New York and the Times Mirror dailies in southern Connecticut. Complicating this is your conviction — and experience — that a Jersey viewer who spots a live remote from Long Island will hit the zapper in about the same time it takes the picture to get via microwave from the truck to the station.

What can you do? For years, major dailies, seeking to expand and consolidate their grip in suburban areas, have been using a "trend" approach to focus coverage of metropolitan regions. If housing costs are up in Maryland, odds are they are in Virginia too. If property taxes are rising in Santa Monica, reporters will check Pasadena's as well. Few non-breaking stories are confined to one part of your viewing area; use off-air reporters to gather information and statistics



Competition is coming at you from all sides. The viewers have taken over . . . The boundaries of local news are changing — *have* to change

on your whole market area. A good local story can quickly — and legitimately — be converted into a good regional one. Sending correspondent/producer/camera crews racing around metropolitan areas is extravagant. Using off-air reporters can help you bring those kinds of stories within reach. Some ways to illustrate them: computer animation, picture-sharing with local cable news operations, viewer-supplied video. And perhaps stations could explore the possibility of stationing camera crews permanently in suburban bureaus, much as newspapers do, rather than rushing them from one end of a metropolitan area to another.

## Don't give up on culture --there's money in it

Newspapers have been growing fat off feature sections focusing on the home, on science and technology, on leisure time, and on culture and the arts. Local stations could, too. For example, how about a weekly segment on home com-

puters; which ones to buy and how to use them. Or live remotes from backyard gardens, complete with information on seeds and soil. Or taped features on architecture and interior design from area homes. This soft-news programming would appeal not only to viewers but to advertisers as well, and the expanded revenues could be a shot in the arm to the hard-news operations of local stations.

There's another major opportunity going begging, one that could more than pay for all those new reporters: magazine shows. Why cede this interesting and potentially lucrative ground to the networks? You say you fear that few locally produced programs would draw enough advertising revenues to cover production costs. The CBS newsmagazine *60 Minutes*, for example, costs roughly \$500,000 a week, according to one informed source. But the broadcast can charge up to \$40,000 for a thirty-second commercial. Local news programming is nowhere in that league. Most of your newscasts charge advertisers little more than \$1,000 for a thirty-second slot. The so-called tabloid telecasts like *Inside Edition* can afford huge promotion and production budgets

# LOCAL TV NEWS: NOT

Seated in a white Camry, we're bounding down an interstate to cover a gathering of experts who will be talking about traffic gridlock — the number-one problem plaguing this major metropolitan area, according to polls. But the reporter and photographer are furious with the assignment. They call it a "newspaper" story. Inappropriate for television.

Suddenly the Toyota's scanner radio squawks word of a collision between a car and a school minibus. While still asking the assignment editor for permission to "divert," the photographer spins the car down a ramp and races toward the accident. "It's a much more visual story and a better TV story," the reporter explains. "The other [story] would have affected more people, but 'school-bus accident' is a buzzword. Every time. It's sensational!"

We arrive at the scene just ahead of crews from three competing stations. The paramedics are placing five elementary school children on stretchers. The children are frightened and screaming, but none require hospitalization.

After wrapping up loose ends of the story, the reporter discusses the ethics of substituting "your basic minor bus accident" for the gridlock story. "You're really not going to learn anything from this story," he says. And if he were to be scrupulously ethical, he adds, he wouldn't use the dramatic pictures of the children: they overstate the seriousness of the accident.

The story makes the opening segment of the newscast. It begins with wailing children on stretchers. Their cries segue into the reporter's narrative: "They lay on stretchers. Or taped to gurneys. Or stared blankly into space. Thirteen

children on a school bus that never finished its morning pick-up." Viewers had to wait until the end to learn that no one had been seriously injured.

Incidents such as this one are frequently used to illustrate what's wrong with local television newsgathering, but are they really typical of the profession? To try to find an answer, I spent three days a week for a month in each of four western television newsrooms. One station was in a middle-sized metropolitan area, one in a large metro area, and two were in one of the nation's largest urban areas. (The sample is skewed toward larger cities because such a small proportion of the nation's viewers live in the 100 smallest markets.) One had won more than 300 journalism awards; another had been publicly scourged for sensationalism.

To see how news decisions are made routinely, I avoided weekends and summer months, when stations are likely to be short staffed, and sweeps months, when stations are particularly ratings-conscious. I was permitted total access to these four newsrooms after promising not to reveal personal or station identities. To measure the accuracy of television news reports, I accompanied journalists on thirty-two story assignments. The cases were not randomly selected. Instead, I chose to accompany reporters assigned to what appeared to be the most consequential stories, and I shadowed those reporters management considered most able.

Overall, eighteen of the thirty-two stories analyzed — 56 percent — were inaccurate or misleading. Unexpectedly, the proportion of such stories increased with the size of the station. With three or more stories due per day, reporters at the mid-sized station had little time to do anything but simply tell what happened. At the large station, eight of ten

*John McManus directs the journalism program at Santa Clara University in California.*

because some 100 stations are buying them. Your news operations are in no position to compete directly with such high-powered broadcasts.

But you admit, when pressed, that the few local news-magazines on the air aren't very interesting. You've rarely tried to combine local personality profiles with hard-hitting investigative reporting and reports on local issues like drugs, education, and taxes. Viewers have shown repeatedly that they respond when news shows like *60 Minutes* go to bat for the public — and viewers have as much interest in local stories as in national ones, sometimes more.

## Yell for help

One of your worsening nightmares is that general managers will be unable to resist for much longer the pressure to fill early-evening newscast time with more lucrative syndicated programming, especially racy quasi-news broadcasts like *Hard Copy* and *Inside Edition*.

Station owners were once prodded by government reg-

ulation to provide public service programming. But TV has been largely deregulated and its executives and stockholders have become accustomed to enormous profits without much commitment to news programming. You, and the newspapers that cover you, should be raising hell about this.

Go to lunch with your local newspaper editor. Tell him or her to urge the reporter who covers TV to provide more sophisticated coverage. Explain why news directors like yourself have to fight harder and harder to justify doing any local news at all. Newspaper editors don't have to compete head to head with *People* or the *National Enquirer*, but television news operations do slug it out with the electronic equivalents. If newspapers were to focus their coverage on economics and the perilous position of local news rather than on ratings and celebrities, they could lean on the television industry to provide air time that's protected from glitzy syndicated programs and from some of the profit pressure. Newspapers love to be righteous about issues like this: let them look for the real villains for a change and get off your backs. *continued*

# A PRETTY PICTURE

BY JOHN MCMANUS

stories were at least partially inaccurate, as were five of six at the very large station.

Of the eighteen inaccurate stories, two contained minor distortions — a photographer asking sitting strikers to pick up signs and march, and an error in the reported cost of a kidney-stone blaster. The other sixteen, however, were likely to have broader impact on how local society understands its environment. For example, criticism of the United States was eliminated from reports from El Salvador and Nicaragua; a major federal office complex was described as a drug den by "multiple sources," who turned out to be only one anonymous source; public schools were declared chaotic despite evidence to the contrary; and municipal employees were accused of having a drug problem merely because the city council had debated a drug-testing program.

Often the station made no effort to correct obvious omissions. For example, a journalist at the mid-sized station reported that many winery workers were unhappy with their union and provided excerpts from just one interview as evidence. Had the producer asked how the reporter knew this was true, he would have discovered that the reporter visited only one union plant and had spoken to five employees, none of whom were union or company leaders and four of whom were either noncommittal or expressed satisfaction with the union.

At all three stations, reporter scripts were not read carefully but merely scanned by producers who, in many cases, were carrying on a telephone conversation. No videotape was reviewed with the script, nor were the sound bites. In an environment in which reporters strive to produce the day's most interesting stories for the first news segment, such lack of

quality control constituted an open invitation to make stories more appealing than the facts warranted. Meanwhile, because they lacked substitutes to fill the air time, producers were reluctant to drop unsubstantiated stories. Even at the largest station a photographer remarked, "We hardly ever pull out. We go on whether it's garbage or not."

Not only was quality-control minimal, but producers and news directors sometimes encouraged or participated in the distortions. Some examples: at the mid-sized station the news director instructed reporters to tease viewers with opening statements that promised more than the story would deliver. At the large station editors agreed that they had distorted the first day's coverage of a teacher's strike, but then repeated the error the second day, presenting as typical the school they believed most likely to render dramatic events and showing scenes of chaos that the reporter had warned the producer against using, explaining that the presence of the camera might have helped to create the chaos. At the same station the news director confided that two series of stories on Central American nations were censored because viewers might switch channels if they thought the station was showing American foreign policy in a negative light. At the largest station a producer instructed a reporter to make a story about a serious civic problem — low voter turnout — humorous.

There is an economic logic to these distortions and inaccuracies. All but one — the cost of the kidney stone blaster — were likely to increase the story's appeal, help cut down the cost of reporting, or oversimplify a story so it could be told in two minutes. As the assistant news director of the largest station lamented, "The industry doesn't reward good journalism." ◆

## Innovate, innovate... before it's too late

Most of you agree that the survivors in the new electronic world will be the stations that signal viewers quickly and dramatically that Channel Whatever is the place to go for information. And I don't mean just the weather. This may mean late-night and early-morning broadcasts and specials. Some Fox network stations, unencumbered by entrenched network programming, are developing their own 11:30 P.M. equivalents of ABC's *Nightline*. Others, like WFAA in Dallas, KCRA in Sacramento, WCVB in Boston, WBBM in Chicago, WSMV in Nashville, WPLG in Miami, and WCCO in Minneapolis are cited again and again by you and your colleagues as examples of stations whose managements have made financial commitments to expanding their newscasts, experimenting with beats, expanding enterprise reporting, and establishing themselves as dominant — or, as you call them, “supernova” — stations in their regions. These stations — all currently profitable — are banking on news as a means of surviving the revolution in viewer habits now under way.

KCRA offers news from 2 to 7 A.M. Mondays through Fridays, from 3 A.M. to noon on weekends. WWL in New Orleans is on the air for four-and-a-half hours weekdays. Other stations are exploring new relationships with cable news channels. KRON in San Francisco, for example, is among 123 network affiliates that have formed picture-sharing partnerships and agreements with CNN.

WFAA, widely regarded as one of the best local news operations in the country, is simulcasting its 6 o'clock news to seventeen radio stations in its market to reach commuters on the way home. This is an innovative recognition of the fact that two-career couples are increasingly either not at home in time to watch early-evening newscasts or busy doing something else.

In Boston, WCVB maintains one of the largest news staffs of any local station — 100 reporters, producers, technicians — and broadcasts special reports on racial tensions, ethnic diversity, and major news stories that are oohed and aahed at all over the country. Responding to Miami's changing economy and demographics, WPLG has aggressively pursued stories in Central and South America.

Local television is undergoing a restructuring eerily

reminiscent of the cataclysm that befell many American newspapers after World War II. With your audiences and ad revenues fragmenting, the decades-old model of three strong, fat local stations in a given market is unlikely to endure. One station will come to dominate each market, just as strong regional newspapers like *The Boston Globe*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *Chicago Tribune* have emerged to dominate theirs. The one with the strongest news and community-affairs profile is the most likely to survive.

## Are you spending money on the right things?

Understandably, you love the uplink trucks that enable you to beam pictures from anywhere back to the studio cheaply. They've freed you from network tyranny, and your anchors and correspondents love to stand in the shadow of the Kremlin. But isn't this really just duplicating one of the few remaining things network news divisions do best — cover national and international news?

Couldn't this technology, and the financial investment it requires, be better applied to being on the air longer, offering more enterprising local news? In the long run, will viewers stay with your stations because of your globe-trotting or because you're providing information viewers can't get on cable or on competing stations — local news?

## Break up the blah-blah

Nightly commercial broadcasts rarely offer provocative or stimulating points of view, either from reporters moving about the community or from commentators (WBBM's Walter Jacobson in Chicago is a striking exception). The use of local television columnists and the diverse voices of residents themselves would help to break up the blah-blah that makes it difficult to distinguish one station's news from another's.

Almost everywhere, newscasts are stuck in the same dreary format: on-the-one-hand/on-the-other-hand/back to you, Donna and Pete. And the major justification for that format — one of the most cherished notions of market research — is that this is what the public wants. Although there are certainly distinguished exceptions, few anchors break the mold of pretty faces, full heads of hair, and re-



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## Market research would never have endorsed CNN — no superstars, no chit-chat. There are lessons in its extraordinary success

lentless, affected gravitas. Market research would never have endorsed CNN — no superstars, no chit-chat. But isn't one of the lessons of CNN's extraordinary success that the network refused to embrace broadcasting's obsession with anchors and simply made news available when people wanted it, not when networks felt like providing it?

It's just a hunch, but viewers do respond to careful but dramatic changes. The conventional format is tiresome; after forty years, anything would be. Market research, after all, isn't effective when there are no competing notions to test against. Charles Kuralt would never make it past most focus research groups, yet he is one of the most beloved figures on network television.

### Don't fake it

The fact that media critics say it doesn't necessarily make it false; local television wants to be taken seriously. So stop patronizing viewers.

Tell your news anchors to stop shuffling their papers every thirty seconds. Viewers know they're reading off prompters; they've seen *Broadcast News*. And skip the hijinks at the end of the newscast when the sports and weather people casually sidle up to the anchor desk and spontaneously burst into uproarious laughter every night at 11:29. Viewers have read enough about television to know that it's phony, that those TV folks spend most of their time calling their agents to squawk about airtime and leaking nasty items about one another to columnists.

In San Francisco, KRON's riveting earthquake coverage was enhanced by the fact that anchors and reporters dropped their formal, made-up demeanor and just told the story. You obviously wouldn't want to broadcast every night under those conditions, but the dropping of anchor pretense and rigid format was exciting in itself.

### Seize the time, before it seizes you

Nobody but Colombian drug lords makes as much money as your bosses do. You tend not to advertise the fact that your profit margins hover at 40 percent conservatively (for ABC stations, add 15 percent). Loansharks would love a markup like that. No newspaper comes close; in print, a 15 percent profit margin is considered heady. Big-city stations

make more than \$50 million each year in pretax profits. Some of that money will have to be spent if television news is to take its next Great Leap. It's an investment, though, not a waste. Tell your owners that the most profitable papers are the best ones, those that invested at the right time to fend off the competition and establish themselves among the people advertisers want to reach.

If you're careful, you can make it all back and more. The networks have shown us that better demographics — as in *thirtysomething*, *Miami Vice*, and *L.A. Law* — can bring in truckloads of money, as much as sheer numbers of viewers can. And newspapers and magazines have shown that better news coverage brings higher demographics, hence more profits.



Remember that this deregulatory era can't last forever. Sooner or later some congressman or -woman is going to notice that you're making obscene profits, that you're broadcasting little public affairs programming, that your children's programs exist only to sell sugared cereals, and that you've grown contemptuous of the notion of public airwaves as a public trust. When it hits the fan, you'll have little in the way of public support. Then you'll be forced to get serious. Ask your general managers how much they hated it when the FCC was breathing down their necks about license renewals.

Perhaps it's time for the networks, their owned-and-operated stations, and independents and affiliates to allot several hours a week to their news staffs for innovative public affairs programming — seed money to see what works and what doesn't. Remember that in other fields executives have learned to view market research as a guide, not a bible. Maybe there are lots of future Ted Koppels waiting to make their reputations by digging into local corruption. Or scores of little *60 Minutes*es waiting to be developed in cities across the country. We'll never know unless you try. ♦

# PUBLIC INTEREST

'The regulatory climate managed, somehow, to keep the broadcasters' greed from oozing across the nation'

"G

reed is good."

That phrase, spoken by Michael Douglas's sleazy character Gordon Gekko in the movie *Wall Street*, epitomizes the decade of the '80s and its preoccupation with material acquisition. It also accurately represents the broadcast regulatory climate at the Federal Communications Commission during the eight years Ronald Reagan was president, when broadcaster greed was allowed more than ever before to become synonymous with broadcaster good.

Until the Reagan years, broadcasting often had been perceived — and had historically touted itself — as a civic-minded enterprise, an industry that gave us Murrow and Cronkite and Huntley and Brinkley, not to mention the World Series and the Olympics — along, of course, with jiggle shows like *Charlie's Angels* or *Three's Company* and the senseless violence and meaningless car chases of *Starsky and Hutch*.

In those pre-Reagan years, television, like airlines, trucking, and meat-packing, was a regulated — albeit loosely regulated — industry. While actual program content came under First Amendment protection, other elements of the industry did not. For example, the number of stations any one company could own was controlled, as was the length of time a station had to be held before it could be resold. Local stations were

required — on paper at least — to air a goodly amount of public affairs broadcasts in order to serve their local communities. As part of the license-renewal process, stations had to go through lengthy ascertainment procedures, polling members of the local community about their likes, dislikes, and needs. The regulatory climate created by the mix of congressional oversight and FCC bureaucracy managed, somehow, to keep the broadcasters' innate greed from oozing across the nation.

Enter Reagan's first FCC chairman, Mark S. Fowler, an attorney and former Florida disc jockey. His predecessors, from the conservative Dean Burch through the well-intentioned, ineffective liberal Charles Ferris, considered broadcasting a business, as Fowler did. But they also saw broadcasting as an industry that at its best gave us visions and dreams and ideas. To Fowler, however, television was just another widget: "a toaster with pictures."

To launch his campaign for, as he called it, "unregulation," he decided to stage a hit on the public-interest standard. That standard, a keystone of the Communications Act of 1934, required broadcasters, who stood to make vast profits because of their control of the public's airwaves, to operate in the "public interest, convenience, and necessity."

The reason the three major networks habitually carried, at considerable cost, the Republican and Democrat national political conventions gavel to gavel had nothing to do with patriotism or some

overwhelming sense of public duty. The root cause was that ABC, CBS, and NBC each owned five hugely profitable local TV stations, whose licenses were vulnerable if public-interest standards were not satisfied. Under the Reagan FCC, the rules governing the renewal of TV broadcast licenses were eased, the result of FCC deregulation, and — surprise! — gavel-to-gavel convention coverage on ABC, CBS, and NBC disappeared.

Fowler also eased the rules on buying and selling TV stations. The result: by 1985, broadcast properties from sea to shining sea were being traded as speculatively as pork bellies. During the Fowler years at the FCC, the three networks changed ownership as well, falling into the hands of bottom-line-oriented corporations. "I advocate a marketplace approach," Fowler said. "Under it, the commission will defer to a broadcaster's judgment about how best to compete for viewers and how best to attract and sustain the public's interest."

The marketplace took over and NBC begat *Fast Copy*. And CBS begat *Saturday Night with Connie Chung*. And Fox begat *A Current Affair* and *The Reporters and America's Most Wanted* and *City Under Siege*. And syndicators begat *Hard Copy* and *Crime Watch*. Most of these shows made money, although their social value was less than redeeming. Under Mark Fowler, that was all right. Greed was good.

Nowhere did Fowler's toleration of greed become more evident than in the area of children's broadcasting. Under his leadership, the FCC rewrote its guidelines for children's programming, not only allowing networks and stations to broadcast more commercials than ever during the hours children watch most of their TV, but also striking down the rules against program-length commercials — that is, cartoon shows like *Masters of the Universe* and *He-Man*, developed by

*John Weisman, formerly TV Guide's Washington, D.C., bureau chief, is a senior fellow at the Annenberg Washington Program of Northwestern University.*

# & PRIVATE GREED

toy companies as marketing tools — for kids. In a 1983 speech at Arizona State University, Fowler put his views bluntly: "If I am asked, Do broadcasters have a responsibility when it comes to the special child audience upon which their license renewal will depend? the answer, I think, should be no."

There have been rumblings on Capitol Hill over the past year that the Reagan FCC went too far in its deregulatory rampage. Even broadcasters have been heard to say that a little regulation might be good for the industry. These uncharacteristic ruminations do not arise from a sense of social responsibility, of course. Rather, they are based on the bottom-line realization that cable, now subject by and large to minimal local regulation, is cutting into their audience and revenues and that federal regulation of both cable and broadcasting might serve to limit the damage this rival can inflict.

Broadcast issues are clearly near the bottom of the Bush administration's agenda. Still, Bush nominated as FCC chairman Alfred C. Sikes, a lawyer and former broadcasting executive from Missouri who from 1986 to 1989 served as an assistant secretary of commerce and administrator of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration at the Commerce Department. Unlike his Reagan-era predecessors, Sikes enjoys wide respect on Capitol Hill. He also has started to roll back some Fowlerian excesses.

In testimony last fall before the House telecommunications subcommittee, Sikes vowed to "stress effective, but adaptive communications regulation, while continuing to remove outmoded or unnecessary rules." His words were a far cry from Fowler's call for wholesale "unregulation." And, according to one House telecommunications staffer who was there, Sikes seemed to hint that during his tenure the public's interest, convenience, and necessity — not the broadcasters' bottom line — might indeed once again be served. ♦

'What bothers many of us  
about the state of  
broadcast news cannot  
be cured by regulation'

BY JEFF GREENFIELD

Once upon a time, roughly a decade and a half ago, the Federal Communications Commission — an enterprise that, many years ago, was a government regulatory agency — was asked to change its regulation concerning earth stations, those dishes that receive satellite signals, to permit their size to be significantly reduced.

FCC officials were surprised to learn that the networks, particularly ABC, were dead set against this change. Only later did they realize why: if earth stations could be made smaller and less expensive, they could be acquired by local stations all across the country. That would mean that the shared monopoly of long-distance transmission would be broken. No longer would a local station have to be linked to a network across a continent; it could receive a signal from anyone who could find space on a transponder — an independent producer, another station, a broadcast consortium, anyone. This regulatory debate signalled both a fundamental change in what viewers could watch — from CONUS to *Entertainment Tonight* to regional news networks — and a shift in power away from networks to local stations.

I begin with this tale because I believe it to be instructive about what changes in regulations can and cannot achieve. Two premises seem to dominate any discussion of this subject: first, that broad-

cast journalism is in crisis, that the public is being ill-served by the ratings-and-profits frenzy of the networks; and, second, that somewhere in the regulatory mechanisms lies a way to further the public interest.

My hypothesis is that these two premises may be substantially unconnected, that what bothers many of us about the state of broadcast news cannot be cured by regulation and that even though regulation can foster diversity and abundance, it cannot guarantee that the content will somehow get "better." One can raise all sorts of objections — on aesthetic, political, or social grounds — to what passes for news and public affairs today, but it does not follow that the answer lies in regulation.

Perhaps the best way to explore this matter is to ask three questions.

First, are general notions about what we want to see more of and less of useful when it comes to making policy choices?

Example: as a general proposition we want more children's programming on television. It is certainly true that since the FCC virtually wiped out its rules in this area, the networks have essentially walked away from it, except for the rare after-school specials of the "Please, God, my dad lost his job and I'm afraid of the hole in the ozone layer" sort.

So it should come as a shock when, for instance, KCRA in Sacramento, California, announces that it is dropping its children's programming bloc. This sounds like a casualty of deregulation. Except that what KCRA is dropping is its Saturday morning cartoon lineup, and

*Jeff Greenfield is ABC News's political and media analyst. This article was adapted from a speech given at the Alfred I. duPont Columbia University Forum earlier this year.*

replacing it with locally produced news and public affairs programming.

Do we applaud this or condemn it? Would we know how to write a regulation channeling kids' programming away from cartoon characters, who are often simply product advertisements?

Example: the 1984 model of FCC deregulation dropped the requirement that local stations devote 10 percent of their time to public affairs programming and 5 percent to local programming. One concern was that this would lessen stations' concern for reflecting the ethnic diversity of their audience.

Now let's assume that stations across the country rushed to drop such programming. From the standpoint of positive black images, what served a community better: public affairs programming that ran at 7 A.M. on Sunday, or the flourishing of Oprah Winfrey and Arsenio Hall as public affairs and entertainment personalities?

Both of these shows are the direct consequence of regulatory changes in delivery systems that made first-run syndication feasible; they are manifestly not the result of content regulation.

Second, if we assume that mainstream broadcast television is failing in its obligations to the public, does it matter at all if that public has access to a wide array of alternatives? To begin with the obvious: if you walked by a newsstand you would see a range of publications, many of which, in all likelihood, would appall you. But you would probably also find more than enough publications to appeal to your higher sensibilities.

Traditionally, the strongest argument for broadcast regulation has rested on scarcity — the shorthand term for the limited number of available broadcast frequencies. But what happens when 55 percent of TV households now get between 12 and 110 channels through cable; when the cost of entry, at least for public access, may be as little as \$10 a week; when it is literally possible to watch documentaries or news or political speeches or — soon — courtroom trials around the clock?

Given the fact that the public has infinitely greater access to programming than it ever had before, why should we want to prohibit a UHF station from closing down its community affairs department if — on the next channel on the

cable — there's a round-the-clock public access channel? Why should it bother us if *A Current Affair* is interviewing Michael Keaton's ex-girlfriend about his sexual prowess if a click of the button brings us a thought-provoking symposium on C-SPAN?

Does this suggest that the broadcast industry should be let off the hook because of the abundance of programming now available to a majority of viewers? The granting of a broadcast license is still one that has enormous economic consequences. It might well make sense, if the free-market analysis is right, to treat broadcasters who are applying for a license as if they were bidding for an off-shore oil lease and to charge them accordingly, perhaps through an annual fee that reflects something of the economic benefit they reap.

It also makes sense to me that the broadcast license should entail an obligation to permit qualified candidates for public office to reach the public, in whatever form they choose, through the use of free air time. Such a regulation would involve not form or content, but access.

Third, and finally, are we sure we know what we mean by "serving the public interest"? I know what it means to me: presenting news and public affairs programming that reflects a sense of history and is imbued with a passion for the written and spoken word, a sense of compassion, a sense of skepticism about the latest media feeding frenzy. But it also means, to me and to others as well, providing diversion from the press of daily life, regular access to major league baseball, and an antidote to the saccharine view of family life one gets from Fox TV's *Simpsons* and *Married With Children*.

Meanwhile, there is some evidence that programming is shaped by the public will. The explosion of so-called trash TV provoked a barrage of attacks from critics — myself included — but now, a year later, the marketplace has changed: Morton Downey, Jr.'s show is gone; *Inside Edition* is now under the wing of Av Westin, one of broadcast journalism's most respected figures; a chastened Geraldo is promising to exhibit a more sober side. And two of the

three commercial networks have repudiated re-creations in news broadcasts.

Another point: the judgments of critics are not always on target. Take, for example, the scathing words of a TV critic as he lashes out at the latest example of over-hyped journalism:

It represents at best a great leap sideways and at worst a pratfall backwards for network news. It does not provide viewers with anything worth knowing . . . cheaply theatrical, hokey, mawkish, and self-promotional . . . it wasn't news, of course, it was new news, neo-news, non-news, a sugary news substitute, newsahol. It was produced like an entertainment show.

Those words come from media critic Tom Shales of *The Washington Post*. They were written almost ten years ago, about a new ABC News program called *Nightline*.

What I'm recommending here is not complacency, but a sense of perspective, a willingness to move beyond the always-acceptable argument that the world is going to hell in a handbasket and big-time broadcast journalism is the tour guide on this journey. I'm suggesting that the fact that the "wrong" people keep getting elected to high office does not necessarily prove that broadcast journalism isn't doing its job; that the preference of most viewers for diversion and escape does not necessarily pose a threat to the survival of the republic; and, most important, that what we can and should demand, as dissatisfied viewers, may not be translatable into government regulations.

What we can and should demand is choice, diversity, and a constant vigilance against the steady growth of concentrated power. In that sense, the most critical regulatory battleground of the '90s is likely to involve not the content of broadcasting, but the structure of the cable industry: How many franchises may one company own? How much can these owners involve themselves in the ownership of cable networks? Can the industry simultaneously be a natural monopoly, a vertically integrated entity, and an unregulated private enterprise?

Making the playing field of communications open, spacious, and free is a feasible and valuable task of rules and regulations. Using them to cure the judgmental defects of the audience is likely to be an exercise in futility. ♦



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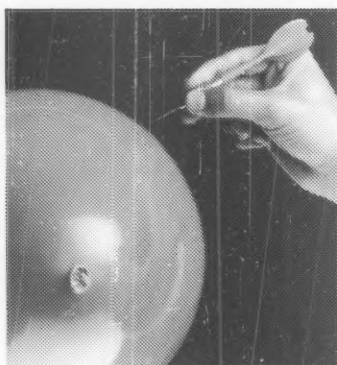
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# RALPH NADER: NEWS CREATOR

BY DAVID BOLLIER

*"Hello, Ralph. You say you've got some hot documents about Commissioner Prendergast? He met secretly with his old industry buddies and then revoked the proposed safety regulations? Hm. Could be worth a story."*

It's the sort of conversation that has probably occurred hundreds of times for more than a generation of Washington reporters. Ralph Nader, sitting in his cluttered bunker of an office, makes rounds of calls to his list of reporters. With the skill of a master publicist, he makes the pitch for coverage of his latest investigation. Or passes along hot tips to favorite reporters. Or scolds them for not meeting his standards of responsible journalism.

Neither politics nor journalism has been quite the same since Ralph Nader hit the national scene in November 1965 with *Unsafe at Any Speed*, a seminal exposé of the auto industry's indifference toward safety. One of Nader's chief targets, General Motors, was so spooked that it made the mistake of hiring a private detective to try to dig up dirt on him. A shocked Senate subcommittee looking into auto safety promptly demanded that GM's chairman make a public apology to Nader. In the klieg lights of national television, a folk hero

was born — and the modern consumer movement got underway.

Since becoming an improbable celebrity, Nader has helped push through dozens of major reforms in various industries and federal agencies. But one of his most important influences has gone largely ignored — namely, his role in helping to transform some of the basic norms of daily journalism.

Assessing this influence is difficult because Nader has a complicated and perhaps unique relationship to daily journalism. In one sense Nader can be considered the ultimate free-lancer, a consummate investigative reporter who ferrets out explosive information, but who has no standing publisher. He generally self-publishes, then lets the daily press disseminate his reporting to a wider public. On the other hand, Nader is not, strictly speaking, a journalist at all, but an unabashed activist whose partisan judgments make him a pariah in the temple of "objective" newspaper journalism.

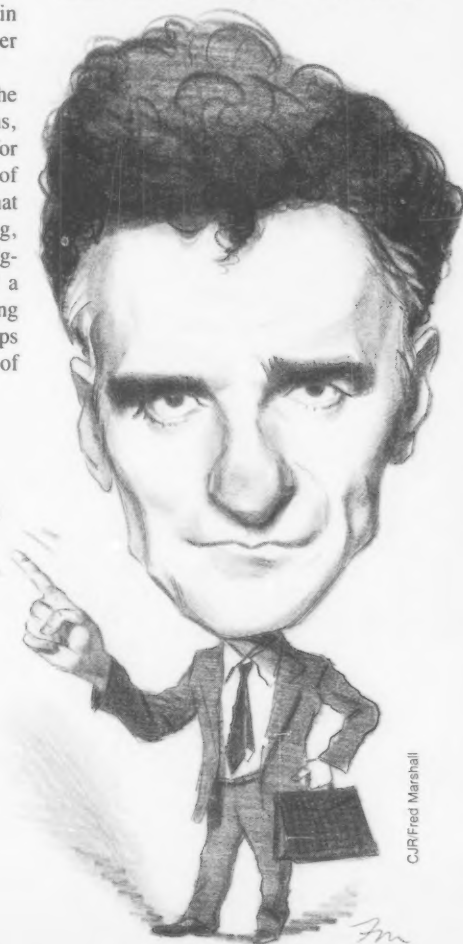
As a maverick sympathetic to the press yet not constrained by its norms, Nader has carved out a hybrid role for himself: he is an outspoken advocate of various open-government statutes that enable the press to be a better watchdog, a perennial critic of parochial news judgment and press self-censorship, and a champion of coverage of new, emerging issues. His various advocacy groups have not only been prolific sources of

consumer news but rich incubators of future journalistic talent, as well. Former staff members have gone on to such publications as *The Atlantic* (James Fallows), *The New Yorker* (Raymond Bonner), *The Washington Post* (David Ignatius), *The New Republic* (Michael Kinsley), *Newsweek* (Jonathan Alter), *The Nation* (David Corn), and *The Progressive* (Matthew Rothschild). And Nader continues to encourage budding journalists by convening investigative reporting conferences for students every two years.

Can an organizing principle be found for this eclectic array of Nader crusades to improve the news media?

More often than not, Nader begins with the conviction that the mainstream press is neglecting a vital issue. The environment, nuclear power, tax reform, economic deregulation, open government, and food safety are a few of the

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CJR/Fred Marshall

*David Bollier is a political journalist who lives in New Haven, Connecticut. He worked as a writer for Ralph Nader in 1977 and as editor of Public Citizen from 1983 to 1984.*

issues he pioneered in the 1970s. Nader then tries to catapult the issue into public consciousness through whatever means possible — cultivating reporters' interest, founding new consumer groups, sponsoring investigative reports and books, waging lobbying and litigation campaigns.

Beyond finding ways to gain access to the press on its own terms, he and his organizations have sought to expand the profession's frame of reference for news stories. "Press coverage of auto safety used to consist of 'Three people were killed when their car struck a tree,'" recalls Morton Mintz, a now-retired reporter for *The Washington Post* who often covered consumer stories. "We never wrote that some profit-making entity had decided not to install seat belts. There was almost no impetus for changing unsafe auto design until Nader."

Nader has enlarged conventional notions of news by enlarging the agenda of conventional politics. "Ralph politicizes issues, forcing them into the open," explains Mark Hertsgaard, a media critic for *Rolling Stone*. By marshalling facts that government, business, and other institutional sources of news are ignoring, he notes, "Nader has shown up journalists as conveying the official line."

It's as if Nader were an editor-without-portfolio, trying to assign his own menu of story ideas to the press corps. Failing that, he tries to make an issue so newsworthy that it can no longer be ignored. That is what happened, for example, when two years ago he helped persuade California voters to adopt Proposition 103, an insurance reform initiative, and when he raised a ruckus over the congressional pay raise last year. Two sleeper issues suddenly became hot national news.

"Ralph has a wonderful antenna for seeing things that are important," says David Ignatius, editor of *The Washington Post's* Sunday Outlook section. "He has an intense curiosity and gets interested in weird little things." Some of the more offbeat campaigns he has launched over the years have attacked the ear-splitting pitch of emergency sirens, computerized billing errors, and ripoffs of sports fans.

"Nader was a reporter's dream," wrote Nader biographer Charles Mc-

Carthy in 1972, "because he not only had accurate, and sometimes sensational, information, but he knew how to present it to a newsmen in a way that often saved the reporter from having to do much work. The facts were straight, the quotes were vivid, and the substance was a declaration of conscience."

Those qualities made Nader a prolific source of news in the early 1970s. "A story slugged NADER was permanently on the [news] budget, often with wonderful results," recalls Benjamin Bradlee, executive editor of *The Washington Post* since 1968. "Twenty inches was standard." The *Post* was so impressed with Nader's journalistic coups that it offered him a seven-day-a-week column. But the deal never came to pass — because of a surge of pro-business conservatism at the *Post*, Nader suspects. Bradlee dismisses that explanation but has trouble remembering why the column was dropped; he suggests that Nader lost interest.

## HENTOFF VS. NADER

At the mention of Ralph Nader, civil libertarian Nat Hentoff practically jumps through the phone with rage, using adjectives like "mean-spirited," "authoritarian," and "disgusting."

Oddly enough, the face-off between the two great liberals was triggered by a conservative, columnist Ralph de Toledano. In 1975, de Toledano wrote that Senator Abraham Ribicoff "devoted some 250 columns of the *Congressional Record* to demonstrate conclusively that Nader falsified and distorted evidence to make his case against the [General Motors Corvair]" in the course of the senator's 1966 auto-safety hearings.

Nader sued de Toledano for libel, asking \$5,000 in compensatory damages and \$1 million in punitive damages. According to Nader, it was libelous for de Toledano to claim, with no basis in fact, that a U.S. senator had accused him of lying to Congress. Nader found no comfort in being able to rebut the charges in his own syndicated column; he wanted a retraction that would reach de Toledano's readers.

When Hentoff got wind of the suit, he excoriated Nader, in several articles in

Intriguing as it is to think of Nader writing for the *Post*, Nader has in fact "gone mainstream" with his journalism on many occasions. His most regular press outlet has been his weekly column, once distributed by the Des Moines Register Syndicate to 120 newspapers, now self-syndicated to 30. He also wrote a monthly column for *The Ladies Home Journal* for ten years. Most recently he became a contributor to a weekly feature on King World's syndicated TV news show *Inside Edition*, which aspires to compete with *60 Minutes* and *20/20*.

Nader is not content with his personal venues; he sees the consumer movement in constant struggle against editors and reporters whom he considers "subject to mercantile moods based on subtle signals from their superiors." Throughout the 1980s, he charges, *The New York Times* consistently failed to cover major consumer stories, ignoring, for example, candidate George Bush's deregulation crusades as vice-president.

*The Village Voice* and *The Progressive*, for using a libel complaint to punish a critic. "Nader has contempt or ignorance of free-speech rights," he recently charged. "He is utterly repellent. He's a bully." Nader retorts that Hentoff is a First Amendment absolutist who believes in no libel actions whatsoever.

Eight years after it began, Nader's suit was still wending its way through the courts when de Toledano, \$30,000 poorer, decided to call it quits and settle for \$5,000. Nader seized the opportunity to tweak Hentoff's nose by donating the money to the Center for Auto Safety to establish a "Nat Hentoff Student Fellowship" endowment for summer interns. An additional \$17,760 was added to the fund when Nader settled another suit — this one against *Car and Driver* magazine for forging or condoning forgery of a letter to the editor under Nader's name.

Hentoff is not amused by Nader's "enormous chutzpah" in waging libel suits or by his puckish sense of humor. "As some kind of model for journalists," he says of Nader, "he's sadly wanting." D.B.





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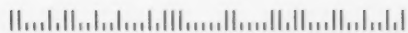
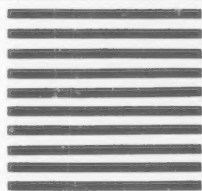
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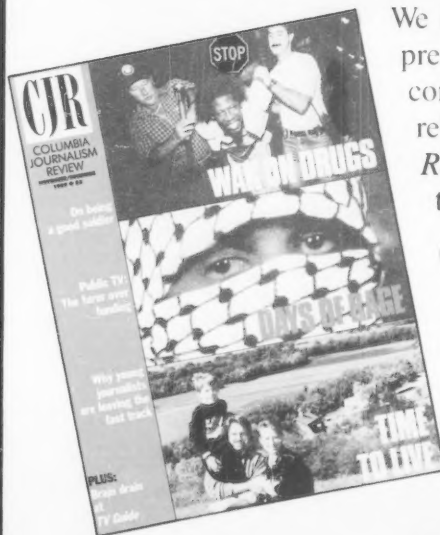
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"I am utterly startled by his loony comments about *The New York Times*," retorts A.M. Rosenthal, executive editor of the *Times* until 1987. "He seems to equate coverage of him with coverage of consumer journalism," he adds. Yet Rosenthal speaks admiringly of Nader's role in prodding the press, saying that he used to make speeches to his staff about Nader's importance to journalism and asserting that "on a broad basis the *Times* has been interested in consumer reporting."

Nader also has harsh words for *The Washington Post*, pointing out that it no longer has a reporter assigned solely to the consumer beat and that its editors often meet informally with business executives but not, he says, with consumer leaders.

The *Post's* deputy managing editor, Peter Silberman, contends that "the consumer perspective" is now incorporated into most *Post* stories, making a separate consumer beat unnecessary. For his part, Bradlee praises Nader's "enormous" influence on the *Post's* journalists but scoffs at Nader's claim that the paper soft-peddles consumer news: "He sometimes wishes that the *Post* was the consumer movement. It's not."

Predictably, Nader has made his share of enemies, who often complain that he is a grandstander and demagogue. Columnist David Broder has called him the "National Nag." George Will has derided Nader "consumerists" as "a few persons who have appointed themselves to speak for many strangers." A common charge heard throughout the 1970s was that Nader was "franchising" his investigations at the expense of quality.

Nader replies that his detractors can seldom cite specific inaccuracies in his reports. As for the consumer movement's credibility, that comes from "acceptance of [our] values and facts by the community," Nader has said. "Where else does our power come from?"

If Ralph Nader and the mainstream press have different agendas, they also share a common concern: how to serve as better watchdogs of government and business. To that end, Nader has sought to act as a pacesetter for the press. A prime example is the nonprofit Capitol Hill News Service, launched in September 1973 with a \$40,000 grant from Nader. The news service grew out of a



## Columnist David Broder has called Nader the 'National Nag'

*Nader testifying before a Senate subcommittee looking into auto safety in 1966*

Nader-sponsored survey showing that most news about Congress came from the legislators themselves.

Enterprising coverage of Congress was relatively rare, even in many papers that had Washington bureaus or stringers. "It was disturbing, in the context of a democracy, to leave the reporting of officials to officials themselves," says Peter Gruenstein, the service's first director, now an attorney practicing in Alaska. "The idea behind the Capitol Hill News Service was to provide news coverage where there was none, and to provide a more pro-active approach to stories."

Eventually the seven-person operation served more than seventy newspapers and twenty TV stations, mostly in small- and mid-sized markets. Mismanagement and underpricing proved to be its undoing, however, and in 1978 it became a part of States News Service, which has no Nader connection.

In another attempt to make the press a better watchdog of government, Nader and his groups have become one of the most active users and defenders of the Freedom of Information Act. The act was enacted in 1966, primarily through the single-minded zeal of Representative John Moss and a handful of press groups. But its procedural flaws quickly became apparent as the early "Nader's Raiders" — task forces of student investigators under Nader's supervision — began filing dozens of FOIA requests. At the time, the press had made requests under the act only three times. Ronald Plesser, director of the FOIA Clearinghouse, joined attorney Mark Lynch to

lobby for what would become the sweeping 1974 FOIA Amendments. "Nader's assigning those two guys to the issue had one hell of a lot to do with the amendments getting through," recalls Sam Archibald, a journalism professor at the University of Colorado who served as staff director for the Moss subcommittee and wrote a key 1972 congressional report that led to the 1974 amendments.

While press organizations were certainly not indifferent to the FOIA, they did not play the primary role in using the act, in litigating to demonstrate its deficiencies, or in lobbying for new amendments. As Archibald remembers, "Concerned, thoughtful journalists were in favor of opening government records, but the press in general wasn't in favor of getting involved." Or as Nader puts it with his customary quotability, "The press was on the record but not on the ramparts." Since its enactment, of course, the FOIA has become a standard investigative tool for journalists, helping to reveal scores of government and business misdeeds.

If Ralph Nader occupies a special niche in American journalism, this is in large part because he is not *only* a journalist. "There's a weird division in this country between journalists and actors on the public stage," observes Michael Kinsley, who worked for Nader for several summers in the early 1970s and who later became editor of *The New Republic*. By blurring the two roles, Nader breaks a cardinal rule of American journalism and challenges the limits of mainstream journalism. It just could be the secret of his success. ♦

# ON THE JOB THE, UH, QUOTATION QUANDARY

BY KEVIN MCMANUS



Roy Bode, editor of the *Dallas Times Herald*, was about as fine a source as I could have asked for. He spent fifteen minutes talking to me about my topic — the elasticity of quotations — and didn't object to my tape-recording the entire telephone interview. So I feel a bit guilty about what I'm going to do. I'm going to quote him verbatim.

"We have an informal policy which is a, uh, policy that's, uh, not uncommon in newsrooms around the country," Bode said, "which is, uh, that if you, uh, uh, uh, uh, put a sentence, uh, between quote marks, uh, that ought to be what the person said." (To tell the truth, when I listened to playback of myself talking to Bode and other interview subjects, I was appalled by my own garbled syntax.)

What I'm trying to do here is, of course, simply to demonstrate the power each writer wields when placing words (and sometimes ellipses) inside quotation marks. It is an area in which, oddly, there are no hard-and-fast rules for us to

*Kevin McManus is a free-lance writer who lives in Silver Spring, Maryland.*

go by, this despite such admonitions as that of Timothy J. McNulty, a *Chicago Tribune* White House correspondent. "Changing the quote, I think, is the equivalent of altering a photograph," he said. "The person is reflected through his own words, and you wouldn't change the way a person dressed in a photograph, or the position he took."

Given the high priority most publications attach to accuracy, you might think that several of them would have drawn up written guidelines regarding the editing of quotations. I could find only two that had — *USA Today*, whose quotation rules are in a brand-new stylebook, and the *Los Angeles Times*. Several publications I checked with, including *The New York Times*, the *Dallas Times Herald*, and *Fortune*, had no written rules. Some editors, however, assured me that they were either drawing up or were thinking of drawing up such guidelines.

Allan M. Siegal, the assistant managing editor in charge of style at *The New York Times*, said, "I think, frankly, that one of the reasons we don't have a formal policy is there's a wide difference of opinion, or a wide range of opinions, on that kind of thing. I'm not saying that we couldn't reach a consensus here. I'm saying that it would be terribly time-consuming to go through the process, and we just haven't gotten around to it." Siegal added that the *Times* hopes to rewrite its style book in 1991.

Walter Kiechel, assistant managing editor of *Fortune*, said his magazine has no explicit quotation rules. "It is understood among the editors that you can in fact edit a quotation in certain inoffensive ways."

"In certain inoffensive ways?" I said.

"Well, ways that, uh, you can, for instance, uh, if the language is, um, horribly ungrammatical and, uh, makes the speaker — as a spoken language sometimes is — makes the speaker look like a complete idiot, you can, quote, correct his or her grammar slightly, or make the person agree with the verb. The noun agree with the verb, something like that."

Faced with a quote like that — a messed-up quote from an intelligent source — the writer does have certain options, and once you consider the options you begin to understand why most

publications do not have clear-cut quotation rules.

**Option 1:** Paraphrase, and don't use quotation marks. William Glavin — an associate professor at the Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University in New York, and

When it comes  
to quoting sources,  
accuracy is  
a sometimes thing

a man who holds that journalists should never clean up quotes — puts it this way: "You can always paraphrase, and often, make the, um, the subject's, uh, I mean the, the interviewee's points more clearly than the interviewee is making them." He added, "Yeah, I mean if you can't write better than most people talk, um, your future's probably in plumbing or something."

**Option 2:** Clean it up. I strongly suspect that most reporters automatically clean up quotes, that the "uhs" and "ums" don't get written in the note-



books and are simply ignored when the tape is transcribed.

What's interesting here is that many sources have come to expect that their quotes will be presented in a coherent form. "If it's someone who's used to dealing with the press all the time, they will probably assume that the grammar will be cleaned up," said the *Tribune's* McNulty. "If for instance the guy says, 'wunnerful,' they can probably assume that it will come out 'wonderful.' And



if they, uh, uh, I've also had sources say, you know, 'Make that right, make that right English,' or, 'Make that proper English.' "

"What do you do in a case like that?" I asked.

"Say, 'Sure.' " He added, "Unless — there are some stories when you, when you want to, you know, you don't want to clean up grammar because it's part of the sense of the story or sense of the person. You know, there may be



times when you want a, uh, a, uh, um, I was trying to think of a Sudanese farmer, uh, you want him — who happens to speak English — you want him to, uh, to sound the way he, the way he, the way he sounds. Or you may want George Bush to sound exactly the way he sounds."

So, if I understand McNulty correctly, it's okay to clean up a person's quotes if you sense that the person expects you to do so and, on the other hand, it's definitely *not* okay because changing a quote is like tampering with a photograph.

I hate to seem to be picking on McNulty; I'm just using him as a representative of a whole lot of editors and writers I spoke to. Most said at one point in the interview that all quotes should be given as spoken and, at another, that it's okay to alter them, slightly. *USA Today's* new guideline is unambiguously ambivalent: "Do not tamper with direct quotes. The only exception to this rule: errors of grammar that are inadvertent, reflect a lack of education, or are common in everyday speech."

**Option 3:** Make some of it up. "If it's only a question of one or two words in a partial quote, I might create a full quote," said Micheline Maynard, a Reu-

ters correspondent who is on leave to study as a Knight-Bagehot Fellow at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism. "Like if someone means to say, 'I think such-and-such,' and just kind of starts the sentence with 'Such-and-such,' I might insert two words that would make a full sentence out of a partial quote. But only when the partial part, you know, stands up as a sentence. I don't like to take, you know, somebody's off-the-cuff remarks and turn it into a whole thought if the essence of it wasn't there."

Maynard's statement surely won't surprise any reporter who takes notes and doesn't back up the notes with a tape recorder. Indeed, all of the newspaper editors I asked about the shortcomings of note-taking conceded that it's impossible to know if quotes from notes are always entirely accurate. "I have many times compared the difference between hand [written] notes and tape-recorded notes," *USA Today's* Prichard said, "and what usually happens is that you'll leave out articles or, or, uh, small words that don't mean anything."

Handwritten notes have an additional



shortcoming: they make lousy evidence in those rare cases when sources challenge quotes, as occurred in 1984 following the publication in *The New Yorker* of Janet Malcolm's profile of psychoanalyst Jeffrey M. Masson. The ultimate ruling in the case had less to do with notes, however, than with the legal permissibility of fabricated quotes (see box, page 56).

**Option 4:** Shape quotes for stylistic purposes. According to the newspaper editors and reporters I spoke with, this

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is not a gray area; it's pitch-black. Liberally adjusting quotes is dishonest, they said (and, believe me, I've got plenty of quotes on tape to support this paraphrase).

What's more interesting is the opinion I got from Norman Sims, a journalism professor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and editor of *The Literary Journalists*. "My understanding is that you can compress quotes, fix grammar, um, quote things side by side that weren't said side by side, um, and a few other things that help your narrative," Sims said. "Clearly there are limits. You can't make up quotes."

As for cleaning up quotes, Sims said, "Everybody does it. Journalism would look more like an oral history report if that weren't the case."

He went on to draw a distinction between two kinds of journalism and suggested that different sets of rules apply

to each. "In magazine journalism about ordinary people you have a responsibility to — in magazine journalism about ordinary people you frequently want them to seem real and intelligent," Sims said. "You have to translate the spoken word into the written word. With political journalism where the sources are pros — p-r-o-s — you have to be much more careful because they probably mean exactly what they say. Does that make any sense?"

"Yeah, absolutely," I said.

But in fact, it didn't make any sense — uh, I mean it did when Sims said it, but I, I'm, confused now. Not confused, but — I mean, I guess I still feel that quotes should be as accurate as I can get them, but it just doesn't make sense to try — you know, with the way people talk — to try to make up a bunch of rules. But it's still kind of weird that there are no rules. ♦

## THE MALCOLM CASE

The most famous modern court case involving a journalist's use of quotations is *Jeffrey M. Masson v. The New Yorker Magazine Inc., Alfred A. Knopf Inc. and Janet Malcolm*, which has come to be known as "the Malcolm case." It centered on a two-part profile of Masson that first appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1983, and later as a book.

In 1984 Masson sued for libel, contending that Malcolm had fabricated words attributed to him within quotation marks and had edited his statements to make him appear unscholarly, irresponsible, vain, and dishonest. One quotation cited was the following (quoted here in part): "I was like an intellectual gigolo — you get your pleasure from him, but you don't take him out in public."

Malcolm possessed handwritten notes to back up the quote, but these were subject to challenge because most of the rest of the profile was supported by tape recordings of her interviews with Masson. In district court and again in the U.S. Court of Appeals, Malcolm's use of the untaped quotes was vindicated.

"While it may be true that Masson did not use the words 'intellectual gigolo,'" said the appeals court decision, "Malcolm's interpretation did not alter the substantive content of Masson's de-

scription of himself as a 'private asset but a public liability' to [Dr. Kurt] Eisler and Anna Freud." In other words, even if Malcolm did make up some of the words, the quote was essentially accurate, and thus not actionable.

"There's an element of people in journalism being sort of horrified by the Janet Malcolm decision," Bruce Sanford, a news media lawyer with the Washington, D.C.-based firm of Baker & Hostetler, commented recently, "and they're quick to back away from it and say, 'Well, we don't need this in libel law because after all we never make up quotes . . .'" The problem with that, of course, is that the rules of good journalism — whatever that may be — are not the same things as the rules of libel law, and have not been for some time.

"Now other people might . . . be horrified that she did that practice," Sanford continued, "but let's face it: I don't think it's any reason to apologize for that decision. The media should applaud the fact that courts are willing to do that hard work, review tapes and notes and then say, 'This may not be a widespread practice in journalism but in this case, anyways, it's substantially true and we're not gonna let it serve as the basis for a libel case.'" K.M.

# BOOKS

## AND NOW THIS

BY WALTER GOODMAN

The lot of a network anchor is not all Porsche and Perrier. Not, anyhow, if he is CBA's craggy-featured Crawford Sloane. Not only is Crawford, that in-depth reporter, in for some in-fighting at the network, which has been taken over by a multinational conglomerate in some sort of leveraged buyout; not only is his competitor for the anchorage of the National Evening News none other than boyish-looking Harry Partridge, the first great love of Crawford's wife, Jessica (for his part, Partridge has an enduring crush on the lost Gemma, the young stewardess who was joyous with life like a fragrant morning flower in fresh spring air on a green and sunlit hillside); but as Arthur Hailey's new yarn begins, Jessica and their son Nicky and Crawford's father are about to be hauled off to the jungles of Peru by sadistic terrorists working for an alliance of Sendero Luminoso, or "Shining Path," and the Medellin cocaine cartel.

What do these cruel people want? Why, what everybody wants — some tube time.

Fortunately, Crawford has the working stiffs of CBA on his side. While FBI Special Agent Otis Havelock is foundering, these super electronic journalists led by Partridge, who knows how to use all sorts of guns, form the CBA News Investigative Task Force (BANIT, for short?). On the SWAT team are Rita Abrams, who exudes a strong sensuality ("a quiver of bliss ran through her") and is noted for her quick assessment of situations and a resourcefulness in getting

Walter Goodman is a critic for The New York Times.

stories back, even under difficult conditions; Minh Van Canh, a cameraman noted for his fine pictures sometimes shot in dangerous situations with disregard for his own safety; and a batch of eager young students and graduates of Columbia University's School of Journalism.

With the help of a few coincidences, the newshounds smell out who and where the abductors are and prepare the way for a made-for-TV rescue. It doesn't hurt that Jessica has taken an antiterrorism course and that on the very eve of the abduction she gets some tips from Crawford on how a hostage might send out signals if forced to face a videocam by his or her captors. Oh, too bad about old dad and about young Nicky's ambitions to be a concert pianist, but then, you can't have everything, although Hailey, perpetrator of the commotions of *Airport* and *Hotel*, can be counted on to give you about as much as you can stand.

Hailey delivers his research in bulk. Hardly has *The Evening News* begun than the reader is at the Horseshoe, hot center of the CBA news operation (known as the Fish Bowl at CBS, the Rim at ABC, and the Desk at NBC), learning about Teleprompters, monitors, mobile satellite vans, and jargon:

### THE EVENING NEWS

BY ARTHUR HAILEY  
DOUBLEDAY. 576 PP. \$27.95

"We'll go with Dallas at the top. Crawford will do a tell story."

Hailey also lets us in on the sexual accomplishments of some of the characters who cannot resist taking advantage of the fact that "in the news business, such openings were legion." (A plug for attending the j-school if I ever heard one. Students will also take note of the fact that the *Times* reporter, rotund, dignified, slightly pompous Graham Broderick, earns about \$85,000 a year, compared with Partridge's \$250,000. Broderick can find comfort, however, in the observation that "despite TV's own news achievements, a subtle, ingrained attitude persisted that nothing was really news until printed in the *Times* or *Post*." Take that, TV. But wait: somebody points out that Don Hewitt has pointed out that the *Times* has four times as many people assigned

full-time to television as to the United Nations. That comes to about four people. Mea culpa.)

To get back to business, the main terrorist is Ulises Rodriguez, code name Miguel, who with icy calm strangles the thrashing, silently pleading woman with whom he has just enjoyed some energetic sex. And there is also slim, lithe, olive-skinned, raven-haired, inscrutable

## 'The lot of a network anchor is not all Porsche and Perrier'

Soccero. But just wait till Jessica gets her hands on that slim, olive-skinned throat.

Everybody in the novel talks pretty much the same, except perhaps for Margot Lloyd-Mason, the power-mad bitch who has run CBA since its takeover by Globanic Industries, a corporate giant with worldwide holdings and a big deal in the offing with the government of Peru. Margot has the nerve to order the president of the news division (who has been looking forward to a long love-filled weekend with Rita Abrams) to take it easy on stories that reflect badly on Globanic. Margot talks this way, with a steely glance: "The News Division's budget is to be cut by twenty percent immediately. You'll receive a memo from me tomorrow and 'immediately' means just that. I shall expect a report within a week on how economies have been made." After one discussion with Margot, CBA news chief Leslie Chippingham asks, in a corner of his mind, "Can this conversation really be taking place? And should I laugh or weep?" Corners of readers' minds may ask likewise.

*The Evening News* is transmitted in Teleprompter prose: "Crawford Sloane's mind was a turmoil of emotions." But, then, as Theo Elliott, head of Globanic, tells Margot, writers are nothing special. And, anyhow, the words don't much matter once the book is made into a miniseries.

# LAYING THE BLAME ON US

BY THOMAS B. ROSENSTIEL

How journalists report on terrorism could make for a provocative, unsettling book. A serious investigation of it might compel members of the press to reconsider how they cover organizations and individuals whose activities arouse fear and loathing, possibly to the detriment of dispassionate understanding. The new book by Wharton School professor Edward S. Herman and free-lance writer Gerry O'Sullivan is serious enough, but it is doubtful that journalists will find it helpful. This is not the work of open minds.

Herman and O'Sullivan's thesis is that the popular notion of terrorism reverses

the roles of terrorist and victim: groups commonly identified as terrorist, such as the PLO, are often "genuine national liberation movements whose constituencies" really are victims of "large-scale terrorism." The real terrorists are the United States, Israel, and their client states. "We believe too that a great deal of the terrorism inflicted on the West has its roots in Western acts and policies . . . The main solution to the terrorism problem for the West is clear: stop doing it." The news media are depicted, or

believe in the exceptional character of their country, the benevolence of its leaders, and the justice of its government's positions vis-a-vis other competing states." Thus "a full scale propaganda campaign can ensue with full mass media cooperation and complete suspension of any watchdog service." This is all-purpose reasoning, handy for all subjects. The press in Herman and O'Sullivan's view will always reinforce the status quo.

Perhaps they are right. But, frankly, all my professional experience suggests that these authors know little about the institutional culture of the press. They describe a fawning, almost jingoistic media in which those reporters who don't "adhere to the same value systems as the proprietors . . . are 'educated,' constrained, and channeled within narrow bounds . . ." The reward systems at the media organizations I'm familiar with generally reward scoops — and not the type that make the president and his policies look more heroic. The occasion on which I saw my editor look most delighted, for example, was when two of

## THE "TERRORISM" INDUSTRY: THE EXPERTS AND INSTITUTIONS THAT SHAPE OUR VIEW OF TERROR

BY EDWARD S. HERMAN AND  
GERRY O'SULLIVAN  
PANTHEON BOOKS 320 PP. \$24.95

indicted, as a chief means of effecting the reversal of roles.

Herman and O'Sullivan do have some legitimate insights. They show, for instance, how in the last ten years a whole new cottage industry of sorts has sprung up to satisfy the government and the media's search for answers to the problems posed by terrorism. They also note that the chief components of this industry — government, think tanks, lobbying groups, foundations, and risk-analysis firms — represent a narrow segment of the political spectrum, usually the right. As a result, the sources the media frequently rely on to discuss terrorism are likely to be conservative, which may have led to a skewed perception of the terrorism problem among journalists and the general public alike.


That the media's reliance on such sources has led to biased coverage is a valid point, one that is popular now among media analysts on the left. The problem is that Herman and O'Sullivan do not attempt to understand why this has occurred or what it might imply. They do not even interview any members of the press to explore the subject. Instead, Herman and O'Sullivan see the issue as self-evident: the press reinforces the values of a conservative establishment because the press is part of the conservative establishment. "Mass media proprietors and reporters generally

◆  
**'A whole new  
cottage industry  
of sorts  
has sprung up to  
satisfy  
the government and  
the media's  
search for answers to  
the problems  
posed by terrorism'**  
◆

his reporters uncovered Oliver North shredding documents in the White House.

It is not exactly clear how Herman and O'Sullivan know what all journalists privately believe. They do not document their allegations or refer to the many surveys in recent years that have asked reporters about their values. The evidence, apparently, is the fact that Herman and O'Sullivan can cite articles that were

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skewed toward the establishment sources.

An interesting possibility, which the authors do not explore, is that if the press relied on a handful of conservative sources during the '80s, the reason may have been the lack or at least a shrinking of a meaningful liberal intellectual base during the Reagan years. Has the press been a catalyst in this? The authors never raise the issue, since they see any tilt in coverage as an inevitable reflection of media ideology.

As for Herman and O'Sullivan's major thesis — namely, that our view of terrorism has been distorted by the media's uncritical attitude and reliance on a few sources — the evidence they adduce is largely anecdotal. They note, for instance, that an Israeli-backed group on terrorism called the Jonathan Institute received uncritical coverage in *The Washington Post*. But there is no systematic study of coverage of this group, or any other focus that might be called a real case study.

Even the limited statistical data they

cite is suspect. To prove their thesis that the press relies on a few sources, for instance, Herman and O'Sullivan rely on a study of 135 articles and news broadcasts on terrorism between 1978 and 1986. They call this a "representative sample." Perhaps it is. But citing 135 press accounts over seven years as proof of what the media do is not social science. And it fails to really make their case.

This does not prevent them from arriving at sweeping conclusions, such as this one: "The U.S. mass media have raised no questions about the premises and agenda of the terrorism industry and generally fail even to filter out or correct literal error." The strongest point the authors make is that the groups the American government labels as terrorist have probably killed fewer people than organizations that the United States supports and labels as counterterrorist, such as certain governments in Latin America. This, however, is precisely where the argument about terrorism gets complicated: one side's "terrorist" is an-

other side's "freedom fighter." Herman and O'Sullivan don't see the issue as complicated. They believe, and make clear in page after page, that the United States is the world's biggest state sponsor of terrorism.

All this is too bad. The press is a mad-deningly reactive institution, fearful of taking the initiative, frightened of public backlash — all of which leaves it vulnerable to manipulation. One of the interesting things about the press's failures is how well-intentioned people trying to do what they consider the right thing journalistically often are led to misplay stories, create the wrong balance, miss out on the truth, because of laziness, ignorance, or because the parameters of the public debate have narrowed.

The coverage of terrorism might have been rich soil for just such an analysis, one that would have said something larger about the political system, too. Unfortunately, this book tells us too much about Messrs. Herman and O'Sullivan. And too little about their subject. ♦

# SHORT TAKES

## CBS PAYS UP

At the Majestic Hotel in Saigon a man is waiting for me. He offers his card. It says he is chief of the press bureau, Office of External Relations.

"There are two men who have asked to see you," he says. "They have a letter for you. You don't have to talk to them if you don't want to. They want money. If you want, I will get rid of them."

Over his shoulder I see two Vietnamese men in their fifties. They are both extremely nervous. They look as if they are on a mission of great danger, that the mere act of dealing with an official of the city administration and asking to see a foreigner and coming to the Majestic involved great risk and greater courage.

The letter is addressed to MR. GENERAL MANAGER, CBS MAIN OFFICE, NEW YORK. It begins:

"More than thirteen years ago after the fall of Saigon (30 April 1975) we, DUOING-THE-TU, alias LE-VIET, reporter, and TRAN-DUC-SUU, camera-

man, had worked full time for CBS Saigon Bureau from 1 May 1975 to 31 May 1975. But since then we two persons had not got pay yet. The reason why it happened so complicatedly and haplessly is as follows."

Complicatedly and haplessly. In three words these two unfortunate men had written a complete history of the war. The letter goes on to describe their employment by CBS News the day after the fall; how they had worked for a month filing stories to New York; how they, with others, had been "nominated as CBS HEROS at the time"; and how, thirty days after their employment, all communications had ended except for a cable from New York saying it was forbidden by U.S. law to send them dollars, but their salaries would be banked in a "big American Bank for security and benefits."

The sums involved are pitifully small . . . together they equal about two hours' work for one of the three network anchormen . . . around three thousand dollars.

The letter ends: "Now we run short of money and have to live a hard life as you should know our situation. Would you please, being on the humanitarian act of the American Custom, pay our salaries . . . as wrote in the Petty Cash Vouchers.

"We are longing for your humanitarian reply, meanwhile, we remain Dear Sir, Respectfully yours."

I approach the two men, who are squatting deferentially in front of the gentleman from External Relations. They are practically quivering with fear.

"I will see that your letter gets to the right people," I tell them. Their eyes dart to Mr. External Relations. I walk them to the other side of the lobby with the excuse that I must be nearer to the light to take their pictures so that New York will know their stories are genuine.

"Please, dear sir, Mr. Morley, we are desperate for the money," Suu says. "Please ask . . ." and he reels off a string of familiar names, American and Vietnamese, people he knew had been evacuated to New York and Washington during the last chaotic days of Saigon.

"Do not worry. I will see that you and Mr. Tu get your money . . . by the way, how did you know that I was here in Ho Chi Minh City?"

Suu laughs out loud. ". . . it is still Saigon, Mr. Morley . . . everyone knows everything . . . and if they do not, then they make up a story. A taxi driver saw you the day you arrived at Tan Son Nhut."

I take their pictures and their letter and promise once again to send them to the CBS accounting people. Will a molasses-paced corporate giant understand the urgency of Suu's situation? I fear that his longing for a humanitarian reply will go unheeded. Not even he, after fourteen years of waiting, understands the gap between the fleeting good intentions of those who send people to gather news and the bean counters who reluctantly pay the bills. It has always been this way. In the heat of the moment the story is the thing and seems worth getting for any promise, any price. The cables of congratulations go out, all the heartfelt but cheap-at-the-price sentiments are expressed. In days the story gives way to other stories, other promises, other cables. It has always been this way, but now it is worse. The newsrooms are still run with the same dedication by men of talent and sensitivity. But the newsrooms are owned by complex institutions blinded by profit. News is not sacred, but it is also not a commodity. It has become one, interchangeable with game shows. There used to be a clearly defined ethos in each of the networks. The ethos today is as permanent as an arbitrageur's smile. Today the bean counters wear their titles with jauntiness and pride. The new true lords of journalism.

Mr. Suu and Mr. Tu solemnly shake my hand. Each is carrying in his other hand a clutch of battered gray CBS News interoffice pouches, filled with petty-cash slips, promissory notes a generation old. They hold on to these disintegrating gray envelopes as if they held some yet-to-be-revealed divine truth. Passports to a new Jerusalem.

As the two are ushered out the door of the Majestic by Mr. External Affairs' flapping hands, Suu shouts over his shoulder: "When CBS opens another Saigon bureau once again in the future, Mr. Morley, please you have two good local men."

FROM FLASHBACKS

BY MORLEY SAFER

RANDOM HOUSE. 206 PP. \$18.95

Safer on his first assignment in South Vietnam, 1965.



Alex Brauer/courtesy Morley Safer

## CBS v. THE SUPREME COURT

I discovered that much of what I had done for years was no longer considered entertaining enough to report to the public. There was a growing list of stories about the Supreme Court and the law that would have always made the *Evening News* in past years but that were bypassed, on the grounds that they were too dull to hold the viewers' attention.

An increasing portion of my effort went into sifting through the Supreme Court docket in search of whiz-bang fact situations that might make it onto *The CBS Evening News*. In October of 1982 I thought I had found a sure winner in the case of *Grendel's Den*.

*Grendel's Den* was an eatery near the Harvard campus that had been denied a liquor license owing to the objections of a nearby Catholic parish. The dispute ended up in the Supreme Court.

As Supreme Court cases go, this one seemed made for the age of infotainment. There were boozy college students, a prudish priest, a famous liberal

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reduce the FCC's authority over them by amending the law — Sam Rayburn's law — that had established the commission. This was only the latest in a series of running battles between the networks and the FCC — battles in which the networks were continually appealing to Congress for help. Did the fact that this applicant for an affiliation was a congressman — “Sam Rayburn's boy” — have anything to do with CBS's decision in the matter? Paley and Frank Stanton were to cast the story in folksy terms. Paley would tell David Halberstam that Johnson had simply appeared in his office one day without an appointment; his secretary had come in, Paley said, and “announced that there was a very tall Texan waiting out there in a big hat and boots who said he was a congressman.” Paley went out to meet him, and the Texan, according to Paley, had said, “Mister Paley, I have this here ticket for a 250-watt [sic] station in Austin and I'd like to join as a CBS affiliate.” Paley had sent the tall Texan to Frank Stanton, CBS director of research, who also handled some affiliate matters. Stanton says he looked at a map, found there was room for an affiliated station in Austin, and gave Johnson the affiliation.

Journalists may have regarded this story skeptically, but they felt they could not disprove it. In fact, however, it is possible to know what would have happened if a noncongressional station owner in Austin had applied for a CBS affiliation — for a noncongressional station owner *had* applied; had applied, in fact, several times. The other Austin radio station, KNOW, had been energetically attempting for years to secure a CBS affiliation. Every attempt had been rejected by CBS because the network already had an affiliate, KTSA in San Antonio, which could be heard in Austin.

FROM **THE YEARS OF LYNDON JOHNSON: MEANS OF ASCENT**  
BY ROBERT A. CARO, ALFRED A. KNOPF, 1,506 PP. \$24.95

Ups had second thoughts. They killed my saga of *Grendel's Den* in favor of a piece that featured a roomful of giggling young children playing a game that had suddenly become the rage of the kindergarten set.

When I asked, in agony, why my benchmark legal piece did not measure up, the response was not reassuring.

“It is Friday night,” explained one of the *Evening News* producers. Viewers tend to be in a light mood as they antic-

## LBJ CALLS ON CBS

Mr. Johnson flew up to New York, where he called on William S. Paley, the president of the CBS radio network, and asked for a CBS affiliation, which would allow KTBC [the Texas radio station that Ladybird Johnson had recently bought] to carry the network's famous, nationally known shows, on which advertisers would be more eager to purchase time than on local shows, and for which higher rates could be charged. The affiliation was vital to KTBC, and Johnson knew it. “This is life and death to us,” he wrote a former aide, Gene Latimer. At the time of his visit to Paley, the Federal Communications Commission was determinedly attempting to reduce the networks' control of independent stations, and Paley was leading an almost frantic fight to persuade Congress to



law professor, and a carefully muted question of Church and State. I had canily concealed the constitutional issue amid scenes of unruly students and aggrieved parishioners; thus the legal point did not get in the way of a good yarn.

To me, *Grendel's Den* became the benchmark of legal reporting in the infotainment era. “If this one can't make it,” I thought, “no Supreme Court case is a good bet.”

Indeed, my piece on *Grendel's Den* was scheduled to cap *The CBS Evening News* on the Friday night prior to the court argument the following Monday.

But at the last moment, the Grown-

upate the weekend, he explained, and CBS wished to end its newscast on an airy note, to suggest that the upcoming evening of TV would be equally pleasant. Despite its camouflage, I was told, my legal story set too heavy a tone to launch our viewers over into prime time.

He concluded, “We don't leave our viewers in that mood on Friday nights.”

FROM **HAPPY TALK**  
BY FRED GRAHAM  
W.W. NORTON 352 PP. \$19.95

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# LETTERS

## WHAT WALL?

◆ I read Michael Hoyt's investigation into current trends in editorial/advertiser relations ("When the Walls Come Tumbling Down," *CJR*, March/April) with great interest. As one who wears both the editor's and publisher's hat at a medium-circulation (413,000) consumer title devoted to environmental issues, I've spent countless hours dealing with the tensions between these two camps.

Last year, for example, I authorized a front-of-the-book editorial section devoted to the environmental damage caused by the automobile — and watched more than \$200,000 in badly needed revenues from car-makers waltz out the door in consequence. During the same year, I responded to dozens of letters from outraged Sierra Clubbers who wish to see only environmentally acceptable products advertised in our pages — each of whom draws his or her own line in the dirt to identify which categories (cars, mountain bikes, animal-skin products, plastics, other nonrecyclables, etc.) are beyond the ideological pale. My regular response to them — that our acceptance of a given ad never constitutes an endorsement of the product or service advertised, and certainly never affects our editorial judgment — mollifies only the more reasonable.

Wearing both hats as I do, I have the opportunity to practice extremism at both ends of the spectrum: I'll take money from any advertiser, be he green or greedy; and I'll guarantee no advertiser either "value added" coverage or protection from our editorial eye. We're an advocacy publication with highly attractive demographics. I expect our advertisers to appreciate both these factors and make their spending decisions accordingly.

**JONATHAN F. KING**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
SIERRA  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

◆ Michael Hoyt's article on the breaking down of the separation of business departments from editorial departments in magazines is well done, except for one thing: Hoyt neglects to point out that the separation has always been mythical. Editors and publishers have always worked together in a partnership — as they should, being in the same business. The most notable and most mythical of

the stories of separation grow out of the legends surrounding *The New Yorker*. In fact, when Harold Ross, the magazine's founding editor, wrote his prospectus, he clearly stated the kinds of advertisers (retail) the magazine was being edited to attract and in less than a year of publication he added what has become "On the Avenue" in order to attract those retailers he wanted and needed. We have all done it and we all will.

Another point Hoyt fails to highlight involves the recent shifts in magazine structure that have opened the way for ad agency sharks and their clients to devour magazines whole, including their profits and their editorial integrity. Less than a decade ago, when the title of publisher defined either an entrepreneur or an executive responsible for the business, circulation, promotion, and manufacturing departments of a magazine, that individual would allow no breach of the rate card, no negotiation of price, and he was usually proud of what the editors were doing. A couple of years ago publishers began to become the chief sales persons and now their chief job is to get ads — no matter what.

**SEY CHASSLER**  
NEW YORK, N.Y.

*Editor's note: Chassler is former editor-in-chief of Redbook and past president of the American Society of Magazine Editors.*

◆ May I add another small piece of testimony to your fine report on magazines sacrificing their credibility to gain advertising. As a free-lance writer, I had a commentary killed by *New Jersey Monthly* because the editor feared her advertiser might take offense. The story was about the loss of civic-minded architecture. In one example, I showed how a bank had remodeled its facade, bricking up the front, creating a fortress architecture on a busy city street. The galleys came back to me with this sentence in the middle of the story: "BETTER CALL THE AUTHOR FOR ANOTHER EXAMPLE, THIS IS ONE OF OUR BIGGEST ADVERTISERS!"

The story was killed. The crime? It "criticized the facade of . . . one of our biggest advertisers," an editor wrote to me. "Sorry."

Sorry, indeed, for all magazines that are



afraid of their own shadow. Incidentally, the rejected story has since run on the op-ed pages of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Oakland Tribune*, and *The Des Moines Register*, and in the business section of *The Boston Globe*.

**HOWARD MANSFIELD**  
HANCOCK, N.J.

## DR. WHELAN REPLIES

◆ In "Dr. Whelan's Media Operation" (CJR, March/April) Howard Kurtz asks, "Why don't more scientists . . . speak out in defense of controversial chemicals, rather than relying on Elizabeth Whelan . . . ?"

Actually, the article itself is the answer to that question. Since virtually all United States scientists have some connection with corporate America, either through university grants or consultancies, any scientist who dares to step forward to challenge hyperbole about environmental risk puts him- or herself at risk of the "hired gun" charge. It is safer to simply remain silent. The claim as advanced by Kurtz that a scientist's link with corporate funding, no matter how remote, renders him or her noncredible has effectively silenced the overwhelming majority of American scientists who would otherwise step forward to respond to those who advance the "carcinogen of the week" agenda.

**ELIZABETH M. WHELAN**  
AMERICAN COUNCIL  
ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH  
NEW YORK, N.Y.

## MORE ABOUT BARBARA

◆ For the most part, I found Jon Katz's review of my book *Barbara Walters: An Unauthorized Biography* (CJR, March/April) to be thoughtful and perceptive. But I disagree with several of his comments.

Katz contends that I didn't "dive deeply" into the part of Walters's life "that is truly extraordinary — the way in which she helped create monster anchors and symbolized the turn of broadcast news toward celebrity." It's the other way around, and I state that quite clearly in the book. It wasn't Barbara Walters who did the turning and creating, but rather the desperate executives at ABC who, in 1976, saw her as a ready-made "personality" who, they thought, could raise ratings, generate revenues, and add instant prestige to their then third-rate news operation. As a result, management was anxious to pay her a million dollars a year, which she readily accepted. As I quote one former 20/20 producer as saying of Walters's current power at ABC: ". . . what she has become is a socialite. ABC doesn't care. They love her. We live in a corporate era and what she does is what they want."

Katz wonders about Walters's "sad evolution from a journalist with the power to bring warring heads of state into the same room [Begin-Sadat] to a celebrity willing to take up residence in Nancy Reagan's cheering section." Begin and Sadat agreed to give Walters an exclusive interview — something she desperately needed at the time to reestablish her credibility at ABC — not because of her brilliance as a journalist, but because of her celebrity status. Begin and Sadat were quite aware that by speaking to Walters they would garner a huge audience for themselves. As I point out in the book, "The picture of the two leaders sitting together for a joint interview with Barbara was more symbolic than what they actually said."

Katz asserts that I'm sketchy about Walters's recent years at ABC, "where she was enthroned as the reigning monarch of celebrity journalism." On the contrary, I devote some thirty pages to that issue, underscoring a number of anecdotes and interviews by stating: "By the late 1980s, Barbara's heavily promoted stories were generating huge ratings for 20/20 and, as with her specials, she veered toward the tabloid side of broadcast news . . . . The mistress of the titillating television tell-all: that's the way many perceived Barbara in the late 1980s."

**JERRY OPPENHEIMER**  
CHEVY CHASE, MD.

## NOT FUNNY, FOLKS

◆ In "The Lower case" in your March/April issue, you reproduce a headline from the *Marin Independent Journal* that reads WHERE CAN A WIDOWER FIND A MAN? This mistake might be screamingly funny to heterosexuals, but it's no joke to me, or to millions of other gay and lesbian Americans. (Just think — where can a man find another man! Who could imagine it! What a gaffe!)

What if a headline suggested, thanks to a typo, that whites and blacks might be suitable mates. Would you find this mistake funny enough to place it in "The Lower case"? No, because jokes about interracial couples just aren't funny, at least not any more.

Gay communities are full of divorced men — yes, even widowers — looking for other men. CJR, get on the clue bus.

**ROB FEIN**  
GRINNELL, IOWA

## SCANLON vs. MORGAN

◆ David Halberstam is right to criticize Tom Morgan's never-ending defense of Renata Adler's reporting on the Westmoreland-CBS trial (Letters, CJR, March/April). The issues in that trial are still important and peo-

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ple should be reminded that her reporting was flawed and unfair.

For the record, since I do have some interest in protecting my reputation as I slouch toward dotage, I might add that I consider Morgan's characterization of my activities — which he describes as a "campaign in behalf of CBS to discredit, if not destroy, not only the arguments, but also the good name of my friend Renata Adler" — to be unfair and inaccurate. It is also symptomatic of how the priests of journalism handle criticism from the laity, offering further proof that Ed Murrow was right when he said that journalists are not thin-skinned, they have no skin at all.

By no stretch of the imagination can it be said that CBS and I, acting on its behalf, sought to destroy Adler's arguments or reputation. We did not seek to hinder or prevent publication of her articles in *The New Yorker* nor did we seek to hinder or prevent publication of the book containing those articles. What we did was appeal by letter to Robert Gottlieb, then her editor at Knopf, now editor of *The New Yorker*, pointing out in specific detail and in admittedly vigorous language the reporting failures in her work. We directed Gottlieb's attention to relevant sworn testimony in the court record; we appealed to Gottlieb's editorial conscience; and we suggested that he closely examine our

charges before publishing the book.

In short, Adler reported and we responded. She rendered her opinion; we rendered our opinion of her opinion. She criticized the CBS documentary; we criticized her criticism. That's called free speech. It is a right protected by the First Amendment and a constitutional guarantee which is available to all — even p.r. men.

#### JOHN P. SCANLON

SENIOR EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT  
EDELMAN PUBLIC RELATIONS  
NEW YORK, N.Y.

### GEEZER WEASEL

◆ Philip Meyer's article about "arguably" ("Trailing a Weasel Word," *CJR*, January/

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February) nicely demonstrates the severe limitations of electronic databases.

According to the files of *OED* and Merriam-Webster (as Meyer could have discovered from the latter's *Webster's Dictionary of English Usage*, from which all my citations are taken), "arguably" first appeared in print in 1890. It was first used to modify a comparative adjective about 1920. And it was being used to qualify a superlative as early as 1953: "This is, arguably, the best Shakespeare film to date" (Eric Bentley, *The New Republic*, August 3, 1953). So that lets Rich Aregood off the hook.

The hedging "arguably" gained wider popularity during the 1960s, chiefly among reviewers, political columnists, and general reporters, though its use is by no means restricted to either journalists or the U.S.: professorial writers in the august pages of *The Times Literary Supplement* seem especially fond of it. Sportswriters didn't really cotton on to it until the mid-70s.

**ROBERT ALLEN**  
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

*The editors welcome letters from readers. To be considered for publication in the July/August issue, letters should be received by June 20. Letters are subject to editing for clarity and space.*

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### MISCELLANEOUS

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# The Lower case

## Striking Greyhound driver killed as union seeks calm

Daily Herald (Arlington Heights, Ill.) 3/4/90



Would-be passengers doze on chairs and the floor at a Los Angeles bus station on the second day of a Greyhound strike that left thousands of travelers stranded nationwide.

United Press International

## Cause of odor in Chester has been found: Henthorne

Panhandle Press (Chester, W. Va.) 1/21/90

Recent visitors were Eli E. Millers and their son-in-law Jacob Hertzlers from Conewango, N.Y. settlement. Jacob had his tonsils removed in Hanover. It was a pleasant surprise to have them for supper.

The Budget (Sugar Creek, Ohio) 3/2/90

## Top court confirms Puerto Rico's fine for prison crowding

The Times-Picayune (New Orleans, La.) 3/20/90

## Flu Escalates to Epidemic Stage, Kills Most People in Eight Years

The Cornell Daily Sun (Ithaca, N.Y.) 1/26/90

## Female politicians discuss sacrifices, joys of public service

The Florida Times-Union 3/25/90

## Bush names new S&L regulator

Times-Dispatch (Richmond, Va.) 3/23/90



Staff photo by Wallace Huey Clark

## Infant abducted from hospital safe

The Daily Independent (Ashland, Ky.) 2/6/90

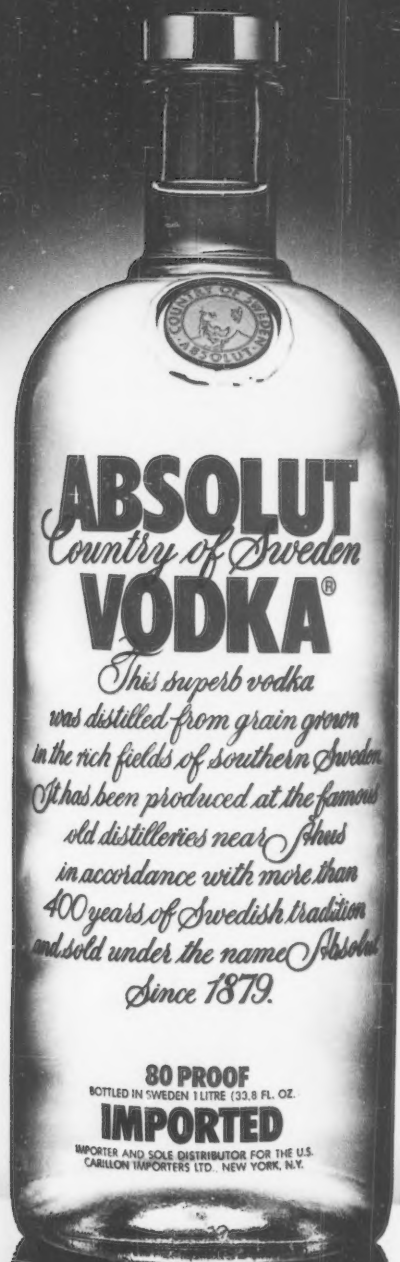
### A Correction

A letter Tuesday misstated the area in New Jersey's Allamuchy Mountain State Park that is being exchanged for parcels held by a developer. The figure is 58,363 acres, not 58,363 acres.

The New York Times 1/27/90

## New Environmental Chief Settles In Well

Los Angeles Times 3/26/90



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